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Ibsen's Moral Order Compared to Shakespeare's

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IBSEN'S MORAL ORDER COMPARED TO SHAKESPEARE'S

by

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INTRODUCTION

Both Shakespeare and Ibsen have been the subject of raging controversy, each in his own day and through the intervening times down to the present. What H. L. Mencken says of Ibsen--that he has been "hymned and damned as anything and everything [else] : symbolist, seer, prophet, necromancer, maker of riddles, rabble-rouser, cheap shocker, pornographer, spinner of gossamer nothings"[1]--can be applied to Shakespeare, if not under exactly the same list of headings, certainly under an equally varied list, and with application over a period more protracted by several centuries. While there is no era, even including the Age of Pope and the neo-classicists, in which the all-over genius of Shakespeare has not been recognized with the greatest respect,[2] yet it is equally true that individual plays and specific aspects of his style and of his dramaturgy have come in for as severe a castigating as the history of dramatic criticism records.

Ibsen, too, has elicited the tribute of constant, or frequently

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1 Henrik Ibsen, Eleven Plays of Henrik Ibsen, Introduction by H. L. Mencken, Chicago, 1950, vii.

2 T. S. Eliot, "Shakespearian Criticism from Dryden to Coleridge," Companion to Shakespeare Studies, eds. Granville-Barker and G. B. Harrison, Cambridge, England, 1934, 260.

recurrent, attention from critics and student analysts of the several generations which separate him from us, until today the controversy has lost its savor for the modern disputant by having been decided overwhelmingly in Ibsen's favor. Eric Bentley says in this connection:

> After all, the Ibsenites won all too complete a victory: their man was accepted into the dull ranks of fame; he was an academic figure.
>
> A supremely great writer like Shakespeare can survive such acceptance--with whatever wear and tear. It is harder for a genius of the second rank.[3]

And Ezra Pound, that modern iconoclast of popular poetic idols, who relegates even the great Sophocles to the shadowy embrasures of secondary prominence in his halls of fame, goes still farther. He ranges them both in the foreground and on terms, it would seem of equality, when, speaking of Shakespeare, he observes: "He is probably, if terms of magnitude mean anything, 'the world's greatest dramatist'! Along with Ibsen and Aeschylus."[4]

But whatever may be the final verdict of the centuries upon the Norwegian as a man and as an artist, he must always be recognized as the foremost protagonist of the school of dramatic realism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shakespeare named a whole age of English, if not of world drama, because he towered above his contemporaries in the degree as well as in the versatility of his genius. Ibsen symbolizes, and, undoubtedly,

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3 Eric Bentley, "Ibsen: Pro and Con," Theatre Arts, New York, XXXIV, July, 1950, 39.

4 Ezra Pound, A B C of Reading, New Directions, n. d., 103.

shaped the trend of a new movement--the most significant movement in theatre since the time of Shakespeare. Gassner calls the Norwegian, "the Viking of the Drama."[5]

The purpose of this paper is to compare the moral order, the ethical and spiritual values, underlying and--perhaps even in Shakespeare's case--motivating the plays of these two molders of dramatic history.

The term "moral order" covers a broad concept, and translated into the parlance of the numerous confused, contradictory, loosely-conceived, and speciously enunciated sophistries and pseudo-philosophies of the day, is capable of being used to indicate almost anything. Scholastic Philosophy is, of course, the system on which it is intended that the terminology and definitions in this paper will be based. Hence, herein, "order" is that state or condition of conformity of things to the plan of existence, of development, and of interrelationships which expresses their God-given nature and fulfills the destiny or purpose intended by their Creator. "Moral order" appertains to rational creatures, only.

Victor Cathrein, in the Catholic Encyclopedia, defines ethics as: "the science of the moral rectitude of human acts in accordance with the first principles of natural reason"; thus indicating, of course, that he prescinds from revelation.[6] However, he allows that ethics regarded as "any scientific treatment of the moral order" be divided "into theological, or Christian

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5 John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, New York, 1940, 384.

6 Victor Cathrein, S. J., "Ethics," Catholic Encyclopedia, V, Robert Appleton Company, 1909, 556.

ethics--moral theology--and philosophical ehtics--moral philosophy."[7] The apparent difficulty posed in the term "Christian Ethics" can be disregarded, since ethics as here considered, obviously, cannot contradict Christian revelation; rather does the latter offer supporting and clinching reasons for certain conclusions of the former. Though, as Ross indicates:

> Not every collection of opinions regarding morality has a right to be called Ethics . . . yet the norm and essence of marality are expressed in our [Cathrein's] definition by the phrase "in accordance with the principles of natural reason."[8]

Therefore, the scope of ethics in the Scholastic concept is normative as well as descriptive, and behind the changing circumstances which "alter cases" and condition the moral nature of an act, it discerns as absolute norm--"an unchanging eternal standard"--based on the natural law, the law underlying the essential nature of created things.

As has been previously stated, this paper purports to compare not only some of the ethical values either avowedly expressed or implicitly discernible in the lives and the works of Shakespeare and Ibsen, but also certain of their spiritual and religious qualities which, at the same time are inherent in the term "moral order." Dogmatic aspects of Religion and theological truths having little or no moral implication are, then, not to be evaluated herein or noted in detail. Rather will Religion be considered in its subjective connotation--as the spiritual relationship between the soul and

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7 Ibid.

8 J. E. Ross, Christian Ethics: The Book of Right Living, Devin-Adair, New York, 1924, 4.

God, or as "the moral virtue by which man renders due homage to God as the first beginning and last end of all things"[9] and the Author of the moral order.

More specifically, therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate wherein and to what extent these two major dramatists conform in certain aspects of their lives and works with the ethical and religious norms laid down in Scholastical Philosophy, with a view to supporting reasonably conclusive views as to the moral order which they respectively represent.

Recent research, notably that of Clara Longworth de Chambrun, G. B. Harrison, Mrs. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, John Semple Smart, and several German scholars[10] furnishes arresting, if not conclusive proof, that John and Mary Arden Shakespeare, the parents of the bard, were recusants who suffered financial and other losses for their Roman Catholic Faith under the sinister Elizabethan penal laws, and that Will, himself, if not a crypto-Catholic during the high tide of his career in London, was, at least, reared in the Faith, educated under Catholic auspices, and reconciled to the Church of Rome before his death. Assuredly these disclosures cannot be ignored in a paper of this kind. They will be given more explicit consideration later. But the chief burden of proof for the conclusions to be deduced must rest upon internal evidence drawn from the dramas of each, supplemented in Ibsen's

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9 Reverend Charles Coppens, S. J., Moral Philosophy: A Brief Text-Book, Schwartz, Kirwin, and Fauss, New York, 1895, 74.

10 Sheed and Ward have announced for the late fall of 1952 Shakespeare and Catholicism by Herman Mutschman and Karl Wentersdorf, presenting "convincing and scholarly arguments for Shakespeare's Catholicity."

case by his correspondence.

In the past, the weight of scholarly opinion has concurred with that of Cardinal Newman--that "there is in Shakespeare neither contempt of religion nor scepticism, and that he upholds the broad laws of moral and divine truth with the consistency and severity of an Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Pindar."[11] This paper will go further. It will attempt to show that, lusty Elizabethan though he may have been in the full tide of his career, Shakespeare had, nevertheless, the moral perception and compulsion--linked with his incomparable craftsmanship--even in an age spiritually slanted sharply downward toward materialism and religious formalism, to find in the liturgy, philosophy, and theology of the Medieval Church the inspiring backdrop for his dramaturgical genius.

Ibsen was more consistently the exponent of his age. Individualism and determinism, the basic foundations of its manifold philosophies, were the logical and inevitable outcome of the Protestant Revolt and, later, of the Romantic Movement. His great pre-occupation with the problem of a dual Human Responsibility--to one's neighbor and to oneself--with its concomitant emphasis on the human will, disassociates him from the extreme determinists and from philosophic pessimists like Schopenhauer. But it will be the endeavor of this paper to show that his insistence on "Self Realization" as the final goal of the will and of all its strivings ranges Ibsen outside the pale of

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11 John Henry Newman, "English Catholic Literature," The Idea of a University, Preface and Introduction by Charles Frederick Harrold, Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1947, 276.

those who may claim adherence to a true "Moral Order" in the sense defined in this paper.

CHAPTER I

INFLUENCES SHAPING MORAL OUTLOOK

It is certainly a truism that in evaluating the essential quality of an individual, the real texture of his character and personality cannot be adequately appraised except in relation to his moral convictions, on the one hand, and the moral implications of his acts and works, on the other. One can hardly compare the respective moral systems of Shakespeare and Ibsen without some reference to the influences which helped to shape such convictions as one feels justified in predicating of them. The influences which ancestry and home life, education and economic circumstances brought to bear upon the personality and genius of each of these ultimately master dramatists were in some respects quite similar, and in others highly divergent. Paradoxically, of the greater man the less is known. As G. B. Harrison remarks: ". . . the actual facts of Shakespeare's life, duly authenticated in indisputable records, are considerable . . . but these records are not in themselves exciting, and they tell little of the personality or intimate experience of the man."[1] The

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1 G. B. Harrison, "Introduction: Records of the Life of Shakespeare," Shakespeare: Major Plays and the Sonnets, New York, 1948, 8.

especially meagre data on which the story of Shakespeare's boyhood rests have been, in turn, augmented and deleted, sifted and weighed until every school boy knows that the basic facts universally accepted can be summed up in ten sentenses, or fewer. Much detail is available relative to the early life of Ibsen, however. Immediately, certain similarities strike one.

Both families were at one time possessed of considerable fortune and prestige in their respective small town communities. Both lads witnessed the declining affluence and subsequent indigence of their parents. Both were reared in homes in which formal religious observance was respected and fostered. In the Scandinavian household religion was represented by the State Church, an offshoot of the German Lutheran religion.

The theory that Shakespeare was born and reared a Catholic has been examined and evaluated by I. J. Semper in several articles, one as recent as 1943.[2] In commenting on the admission of the Oxford historian, Arthur D. Innes, that Catholics would be justified in alleging "presentable" though "not more than presentable"[3] arguments for this contention, Semper says: "The fact is that non-Catholics have made a presentable case for Shakespeare's Catholicism."[4] And he proceeds to quote evidence and views from such authorities as

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2 I. J. Semper, "Shakespeare's Religion Once More," The Catholic World, New York, CLVI, February, 1943, 589-596.

3 Arthur D. Innes, England Under the Tudors, 8th ed., London, 1926, 412.

4 Semper, Catholic World, CLVI, 590.

Sir Edmund K. Chambers[5] and Thomas Marc Parrott[6] of Princeton University. He cites the researches of Mrs. C. C. Stopes[7] and those of John Semple Smart[8] in regard to the documents which show that John Shakespeare, father of the bard, was twice listed as a recusant and summoned before the courts for fines. These circumstances would certainly explain the decline of the family fortunes and that dearth of records which leaves us so much in the dark concerning the youth, education, and young manhood of the poet. John Dover Wilson thinks it possible that not only was the youthful Shakespeare himself educated under Catholic auspices, maybe in the household of some notable Catholic peer or member of the landed gentry, but that during part of those uncharted years between 1580 and 1592 when--on the evidence of the casual observation which Jonson credited to the Restoration actor, William Beeston--Shakespeare is often reputed to have been teaching school, actually, he was tutoring children of the Catholic gentry or conducting a secret school for Catholic families of the shire.[9]

Perhaps the most forthright sponsor for the foregoing theories is

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5 E. K. Chambers, Sources for a Biography of Shakespeare, Oxford, 1946, 20.

6 Thomas Marc Parrott, William Shakespeare: A Handbook, New York, 1934, 7-8.

7 Mrs. C. C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Family: A Record of the Ancestors and Descendants of William Shakespeare: With Some Account of the Ardens, London, 1901, 55-56.

8 John Semple Smart, Truth and Tradition, London, 1928.

9 John Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure, Cambridge, England, 1932.

the Countess de Chambrun, author of six books of recognized scholarship on these and allied questions. For over a quarter of a century Clara Longworth de Chambrun has pursued investigations along pathways formerly unexplored--or, perhaps, systematically ignored--in the field of Shakespeareana. In her monograph of documents published in 1934, she notes the proper connotation of the term "recusant"--one "who refused to swear an oath acknowledging the Queen's spiritual authority."[10] The word is not always carefully used by quite a few commentators. She explains the full import of John Shakespeare's name on a list of recusants, which included the "mark of indictment against eleven priests declared still 'lurking' in the shire."[11] In a later work the same author gives the complete text of the "Spiritual Testament" of John Shakespeare with a detailed history of the document, the full case for its authenticity and significance in the Catholicity theory, and a commentary on the collation made by Father Herbert Thurston, S. J. of this document with the original model[12] given by Saint Charles Borromeo to "the members of the English mission of 1580" and distributed by one of those "who went into Warwickshire--Freeman, Oldcorne, Davis, Mountford Scott, or Campion himself."[13]

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10 Clara Longworth de Chambrun, Essential Documents Never Yet Presented in the Shakespeare Case, Bordeaux, 1934, 12.

11 Ibid., Plate IV, 8.

12 Herbert Thurston, S. J., "The Spiritual Testament of John Shakespeare," The Month, CXVIII, November, 1911, 487-502.

13 Clara L. de Chambrun, Shakespeare Rediscovered, with a Preface by G. B. Harrison, London, 1938.

Besides presenting new material in this last cited work, Madame de Chambrun amplifies her earlier findings and reiterates her conclusions, in which regard G. B. Harrison judiciously comments thus in the "Preface":

> Unfortunately, no one is entirely disinterested either in Shakespeare or in religion; and even the most austere and self-respecting scholars will distort the evidence to suit their own Theories and prejudices. . . . Until recent years religious partisanship has been so strong in England that it has hardly been possible for such a question to be examined without heat, but the belief that Shakespeare's family were Catholic is nowadays generally gaining ground. The evidence which Madame de Chambrun now brings together will, I think, convince any impartial reader, . . . at least that the story of religious persecution during Shakespeare's lifetime needs to be rewritten in the fullest possible detail. If [her] thesis is accepted . . . the search for the facts of Shakespeare's early life must start again in new places.[14]

The splendid achievements of Madame de Chambrun and others[15] in this field have been only sketchily indicated here. A fuller discussion of the question, while highly relevant to the purpose of this paper, is nevertheless, a by-path from the main objective. Much arduous and patient investigation and sifting of data must be expended before the mission links can be uncovered and all loose ends tied together. Doubtless many closed minds as well as hidden records will have to be opened to the "light." Miss Frances A. Yates has suggested that search be made for Elizabethan records of Catholic recusants, friends, and dependents of Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's one time patron, whose London House was a center of Catholic

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14 Ibid., vi.

15 See above vii, n. 10. This most recent work by Mutchman and Wentersdorf on the subject of Shakespeare's Catholicity had been announced, but was not as yet for sale, when this study was submitted. The notices gave promise of fresh and valuable material in the field.

activities when the young poet was first welcomed there, and who later suffered imprisonment for his Faith.[16]

The importance of Henry Wriothesley's interest in Shakespeare has been repeatedly stressed by Madame de Chambrun, and she notes with pleasure the concurrence in this opinion of Dover Wilson and Professor A. W. Pollard.[17] In the "brilliant circle of which the young earl was an ornament,"[18] the budding playwright not only met on terms of mutual admiration and friendship such distinguished nobles as Essex, Stanley, and the Pembroke brothers, but came into contact with the Elizabethan phase of the English Renaissance at its best. The youthful Southampton was well qualified by breeding, education, and natural ability to judge with discrimination the art and scholarship of his day. In the opinion of Giovanni Florio, the earl's protege and an "apostle of the Renaissance in England,"[19] Wriothesley had even added thereto by personal contribution, as well as by his lavish and impartial patronage of other scholars. It is well known, too, that his interest in the theatre was absorbing. That he shared his Italian tudor with Shakespeare was long ago proved by Madame de

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16 Frances A. Yates, John Florio: The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England, Cambridge, England, 1934, 126.

17 A. W. Pollard and J. Dover Wilson, Shakespeare Problems, London, 1923.

18 Marc Parrott, Shakespeare Handbook, 41.

19 C. de Chambrun, Shakespeare Rediscovered, 120.

Chambrun,[20]

But that the earl's household was an eminently Catholic one, also, was equally well known. Neither the immunization from the Statutes accorded the illustrious house of Montague, his Mother's family, nor his own great influence with Robert Devereux, earl of Essex--Elizabeth's current favorite--exempted him from espionage on the part of the "pack," as the latter called Walsingham, Burleigh, and company, Miss Frances Yates offers weighty evidence that Florio, himself, was in the pay of Burleigh's Intelligence service.[21]

These, then, were the associations and influences which completed the young Warwickshire school master's panoramic survey of the minds and manners of his times, and which helped to make him in his work essentially a projection of the Renaissance. He reflects every aspect of its kaleidoscopic intellectual, cultural, and social life--in the shire, in the city streets and marts, in the court. He is the greatest of the sonneteers, the master dramatist of them all. All classes arrest his attention; all questions pique his interest. "The life of sixteenth century England pulses through all his plays, not excluding those whose scene is laid in Italy or ancient Rome." But there is one strange abstention. "Nothing is more remarkable in his work," continues Dover Wilson, "than its silence concerning the religious life and violent theological con-

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20 Clara L. de Chambrun, Giovanni Florio: un apotre de la Renaissance a l'epoque de Shakespeare, Paris, 1921.

21 F. A. Yates, John Florio, 25-26.

troversy of his time."[22]

Many another student of the greatest of the Elizabethans has shared the wonder of Mr. Wilson. And this very puzzlement raises yet another speculation. Is it really true that Shakespeare wrote nothing that committed him on the "violent theological controversy" which he witnessed at first hand--which, indeed, impinged directly upon lives and fortunes of his family and his friends? Madame de Chambrun cites two examples which show that "[h]is art, as he himself complained, was made 'tongue tied by authority'." To quote in part:

> A manuscript belonging to his company was discovered, a century ago, in the censor's portfolio. It dealt with the forbidden topic, the life and death of a political hero and religious martyr, Sir Thomas More; Edmund Tilney's hand can still be read warning the players to omit the Ill May-Day scene, or present it at their peril. The censor also dealt harshly with Falstaff under the original name which Shakespeare had chosen for him, "Sir John Oldcastle." Oldcastle, in fact, was a great favourite in the contemporary world of Puritans.[23]

One may ask what other suppressions and warnings occurred of which the record is lost? Again, is it true that he nowhere speaks his mind in this regard in the golden legacy he, perhaps unwittingly, has left to the ages? The "Mercy Speech" might easily be construed as a subtle rebuke to Elizabeth as could, also, the portrait of the "parfait gentil knyght" and Christian monarch presented in his Henry V. More significant, still, are certain lines in the death scene of the old warrior, John of Gaunt, in Richard II--

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22 John Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, Cambridge, England, 1920, viii.

23 C. L. de Chambrun, Shakespeare Rediscovered, 122.

> That England which was wont to conquer others
> Hath made a shameful conquest of herself[24]

which could be readily interpreted as a "lament on civil ruin and useless bloodshed occasioned by persecution."[25] And the following from his rebuke to the King--

> Landlord of England art thou now, not King.
> Thy state of law is bondslave to the law,
> And thou--[26]

could have been fittingly addressed to Elizabeth. Indeed, "[c]ontemporaries, especially followers of the Earl of Essex, saw in the play of Richard II typical parallels with their own times which were much marked."[27]

Moreover, it must be admitted that, if he did not disapprove openly, nowhere can it be found that he did approve even cryptically. The records divulge no eulogy that flowed from his golden pen at Elizabeth's death. Had there been one, that would never have been lost; rather would it have emblazoned the title page of every edition of his works and every biography of the bard down the years.

Finally, is it fantastic to suppose that Shakespeare chose to take the only means open to him in those ominous times: that of using his peerless gifts to keep alive with the most casual but unmistakeable consistency--what

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24 Harrison, "Richard II," II, i, 65--66, Shakespeare, 201.

25 C. L. de Chambrun, Shakespeare Rediscovered, 131.

26 Harrison, "Richard II," II, i, 113-115, Shakespeare, 202.

27 Ibid., "Introduction," 191.

must have been for most of his audience--the warm and nostalgic memory of the "Old Faith"? Surely this supposition is, at least, as plausible as some of the forced, pseudo-mystical interpretations so dogmatically substituted for the forthright admission that--crypto-Catholic, or no--final deathbed penitent and reverter to the Faith, or not--the cumulative impression of himself made by his works is of one deeply reverent toward the Church of the Middle Ages, intimately at home, and entirely sympathetic with Her dogma, morals, and practice. Graham Greene says in this connection:

> It must be remembered that we are still within the period of the Morality: they are being acted yet in the country districts: they had been absorbed by Shakespeare, just as much as he absorbed the plays of Marlowe, and the abstraction--the spirit of Revenge (Hamlet), of Jealousy (Othello), of Ambition (Macbeth), of Ingratitude (Lear), of Passion (Antony and Cleopatra)--still rules the play. And rightly. Here is the watershed between the morality and the play of character: the tension between the two is perfectly kept: there is dialectical perfection. After Shakespeare, character--which was to have its dramatic triumphs--won a too-costly victory.[28]

The foregoing questions need to be asked and possible answers, weighed, even though the further development and attempt to demonstrate the last contention is, as has been said previously, the main aim of this paper; nor is it rendered less tenable by freely conceding that obvious paradoxes in both his career and works have yet to be solved. In view of G. B. Harrison's remarks,[29] it seems evident that success in this endeavor will exact of the

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28 Graham Greene, "British Dramatists," Romance of English Literature, New York, 1944, 144.

29 See Above, 5, n. 12.

investigator, besides scholarship and uncompromising integrity, indomitable persistence and determination--to say nothing of entree into secret and hidden treasure holds. There will probably be--as many in the future as there have been in the past--"keepers of keys" reluctant to admit and ingenious in dissembling the fact which Madame de Chambrun states so impartially:

> It would be hard to write a life of Abraham Lincoln and omit the elemental fact that the American Constitution permitted slavery under the Stars and Stripes until his time. It is equally impossible to understand the conditions of civil life throughout the midland shires under Queen Elizabeth if we forget or ignore that two-thirds of her subjects dwelt in a state of virtual slavery after the passing in 1559 of her new legislation: The Act of Supremacy and its corollary, the Act of Uniformity.[30]

Herein lies the key to the Shakespeare enigma.

In the case of the youthful Ibsen the external evidence limns a more clear-cut picture. There is no doubt that the bankruptcy of his father was occasioned by his own misjudgment in speculation and in other business activities. No doubt the political events of 1814 were accompanied by fluctuating markets and other repercussions in the Norwegian business man's world of finance, for in that year Norway ceased to be a dependency of Denmark, uniting its crown to that of Sweden, yet still maintaining absolute independence except in foreign affairs. Weight is given to this opinion by the fact that Knud Ibsen senior was struggling with his financial difficulties for some years before bankruptcy actually put an end to his business in 1836. Henrik was only eight when the family retired to a small farm near the shipping and

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30 C. C. de Chambrun, Essential Documents, 11.

commercial town of Skien, scene of their former affluence and prestige; but none felt more bitterly the pinch of poverty and the sting of threadbare gentility than he. Even as a lad, he must have sensed the spiritual barrenness and stultifying formalism of the Puritanical state religion, for, by the time the family resumed urban life, Henrik, then only fifteen, had already decided to steer his course by a different star. Maurice Francis Egan, United States Minister to Denmark from 1907 to 1916 says:

> The fact must be kept in mind that among these Northern peoples, the State Church represented religion, which was either an intolerant and illogical autocracy, forbidding even reasonable pleasures, or a purely formal cult, such as the State Church became in Russia.[31]

Young Henrik, then, left home to earn a meagre wage as a chemist's clerk with a view to financing the tutoring he needed in preparation for his matriculation at the University of Christiania. He seems to have permanently severed all connection with his home, for his family, in time, came to regard him as "a freethinker and lost soul."[32] Whatever attempts they made to restore his religious affiliations only augmented his antagonism.

This disaffection with formal religion, though partly compounded of resentment toward smug, middle-class respectability and righteousness of all kinds--a bitterness engendered by his own isolation from the comforts and complacence of that estate--was rooted also in another influence that left its

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31 Maurice Francis Egan, "Ibsen in Scandinavia," America, New York, XIX, April 13, 1918. 629.

32 Gassner, Masters of Drama, 357.

mark on his works and to some extent on his life. Through a certain Lammers, itinerant revivalist preacher, Ibsen came in contact as early as 1849 with the tenets of the Danish philosopher, Soren Aabye Kierkegaard. The four salient ideas of this forceful propagandist are summed up thus by Brian Downs in his study of Ibsen's intellectual background.

> (i) the rigid delimitation of three moral spheres, as the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious stages or stadia, and the denial of any valid compromise or synthesis between them;
>
> (ii) the inordinately stern conception which admitted as 'Christian' nothing less than 'Christ-like' and held the profession of Christianity not merely to imply a readiness to suffer the fate of its founder, but to involve actual martyrdom, so that, in effect, a man only becomes a Christian by ceasing (in carnal terms) to exist, a condition which might be called [according to Downs] the Christian paradox in its most extreme form;
>
> (iii) concomitant with this, a devastating contempt for the modern clergy as being no Christians according to the definition, but odiously hypocritical civil servants;
>
> (iv) the paramount power and importance of the human will and of the free choice which is granted the individual, by his sole exertion, to abide in any of the three stadia mentioned, or alternatively to pass from one of them to another.[33]

Ibsen was always loath to admit indebtedness to anyone, whether for character types, plot devices, or dramatic technique. But, though Kierkegaard died in 1854, there is every evidence that Ibsen knew well his theories, not only through Lammers, but also from association with a virile young parson of the new order, Christopher Brun, and through his wife's step-mother, both enthusiastic disciples of the Danish innovator. Moreover, a number of Ibsen's

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33 Brian Downs, Ibsen, the Intellectual Background, Cambridge, England, 1946, 80.

works are constructed on themes that pose the Kierkegaard question of the relation of aesthetics to other values of life. The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken are examples in point. Indeed, Downs believes that his particular aspect of the four moral stadia extended to the consideration of aesthetics versus life itself "was nothing less than an absorbing theme throughout the whole of Ibsen's life," and he notes that "almost all his later work touches upon it in one form or another."[34]

When Brand was produced in 1866, discussion immediately centered around the question whether the hero might not be Kierkegaard, himself, and whether the prototype represented the ethical or the religious moral stadium. Ibsen's assertion at this time that "he had read very little and understood even less of Kierkegaard"[35] has been frequently discounted. Muriel Bradbrook says:

> Although Ibsen disclaimed any debt to Kierkegaard--whilst admitting that he had drawn upon the story of Kierkegaard's disciple Lammers, who had converted his own family in his native town of Skien--it was the general opinion that Ibsen had put a good deal of Kierkegaard into Brand.[36]

Halvdan Koht, whose biography translated from the original Norwegian and sponsored by the American-Scandinavian Foundation is considered definitive, notes that:

> Time and again, even constantly, as one reads Brand, one seems

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34 Ibid., 83.

35 Henrik Ibsen, Letters of Henrik Ibsen, trans. John N. Laurvik Mary Morison, New York, 1905, 199.

36 Muriel Bradbrook, Ibsen the Norwegian: A Revaluation, London, 1948, 43.

> to hear Kierkegaard speak. . . . Further, one is reminded of Kierkegaard's struggle, of his constant desire to be alone with his truth, and of how the world considers him insane, when one reads in Brand the stinging phrase:
>
> --But mad is odd,
> And oddness singleness, you know.[37]

Brian Downs concedes that

> an author's disclaimer of such a kind demands respectful attention. But first, Ibsen habitually minimized resemblances between himself and others; secondly, without any direct borrowing from Kierkegaard, he may have been affected by ideas that had originated with the Danish moralist, but had been put into circulation by others . . . ; thirdly, to Brand, . . . in which it is quite impossible to ignore important Kierkegaardian elements.[38]

Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Ibsen's own further comments upon the subject. He continues: "That Brand is a clergyman is really immaterial; the demand, 'All or nothing,' is made in all domains of life--in love, in art, etc. Brand is myself in my best moments."[39] But the question of Ibsen's religious convictions as implied or enunciated in his works will be considered later.

Ibsen suffered from three frustrations at various periods during his life--sometimes from all of them simultaneously. Each contributed to the lasting bitterness that seems to have tinctured so many of his human relationships outside his immediate family, and is a dark thread running through much of his work. It is more evident, of course, in his social dramas: The Doll's

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37 Halvdan Koht, The Life of Ibsen, I, New York, 1931, 273-274.

38 Brian Downs, A Study of Six Plays of Ibsen, Cambridge, England, 1950, 14.

39 Henrik Ibsen, Letters, 199.

House, 1879; Ghosts, 1881; Rosmersholm, 1886; and certainly in Hedda Gabler, 1890. The grinding poverty of his childhood with its concomitant ostracism from the genteel, middle-class society to which he felt he rightfully belonged, persisted, to become the bane of his undergraduate days at the University of Christiania. It was probably part reason for the boisterous convivial and pseudo-journalistic outbursts of this period which won him temporary notoriety. For, though the revolutions of 1848 that tottered the social and political under-pinnings of European culture were admittedly the inspiration for his first drama, Catiline, 1850,[40] there can be no doubt that his interest in the general concept of revolution was more subjective at that time than it was national or humanitarian. Downs says in this regard: "In so far as radicalism and the cry for political liberty meant anything to him personally, they always implied the emancipation of the individual from the restraint of magistrates and majorities."[41]

Ibsen's second frustration was one he shared with Shakespeare, himself, and it was closely bound up with the third bitter disappointment of his life. Like his great Elizabethan predecessor, Ibsen wished above all things to be a poet. Ezra Pound echoes the sentiments of several other Shakespeare students when he cites and endorses Felix Schelling's theory that the master dramatist "wanted to be a poet, but that when he couldn't make career of it,

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40 Edmund Gosse, Henrik Ibsen, New York, 1907, 18.

41 Downs, Ibsen, Intellectual Background, 6.

he took to writing stage plays, not altogether liking the form. . . . The best thing I ever heard in Doctor Schelling's class-room."[42]

Despite the paradoxical implications of his subsequent voluntary and protracted exile from his native land, Ibsen was passionately fond of it and was steeped in Scandinavian folk lore. This circumstance is especially significant in view of the fact that he was never a voluminous reader. Dante, Shakespeare, and Voltaire were his only intimates besides the Bible and his beloved Holberg.[43] Ibsen dreamed of becoming the Norwegian national poet, the expounder of the "King Thought" or "Royal Idea" which had been the theme of his near-great historical drama, the Pretenders. This concept, which he felt he had really originated, was, he hoped, destined to weld Norway as a nation--not as a forcibly unified state--and might even become the amalgam for a sworn brotherhood of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark directed by Charles XV of Sweden; for Scandinavianism, which had been much in the air during Ibsen's student days, had become a burning issue in the sixties with the threatening of the Slesvig-Holstein Duchies of Denmark by the Teutonic powers, Prussia and Austria.

Ibsen was bitterly disappointed--in some sense personally affronted--by Norway's failure to aid Denmark in 1864.[44] He seemed to experience a feeling of personal as well as of national guilt. His alibi--that

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42 Ezra Pound, A B C of Reading, 60, 103.

43 Gosse, Henrik Ibsen, 222.

44 Downs, Ibsen, Intellectual Background, 99.

poets have other tasks--sounded just as specious to him as it obviously did to those who suggested that he join the Norwegian volunteers in conscientious protest.[45] It was in this mood of flaming indignation and chagrin, aggravated by the failure of his latest play, Love's Comedy, and by the inadequacy of his income as theater manager at Christiania, that he took his impoverished family--his wife and their little son--to Rome for the first phase of his twenty year exile from Norway.

Ibsen's next three plays, Brand, Peer Gynt, and the League of Youth are addressed to his countrymen in bitter and scathing rebuke; for, the first named carries parallel to the ethical or religious theme--"All or nothing"--a sociological one, not always clearly discernible, but consciously intended by the still outraged author. He says of it himself in a letter addressed to Peter Hansen from Dresden in 1870:

> Exactly at the time when The Pretenders came out, Frederick VII died, and the war began. I wrote a poem, "En broder i nod." . . . Then I went into exile!
>
> About the time of my arrival at Copenhagen, the Danes were defeated at Dybbal. In Berlin I saw King William's triumphal entry with trophies and booty. During those days Brand began to grow within me like an embryo. When I arrived in Italy, the work of unification there had already been completed by means of a self-sacrifice which knew no bounds.[46]

To him Peer Gynt was an emblematic national figure--not a typical Norwegian--but in his laziness and inertia, the embodiment of his country's national

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45 Ibid., 100.

46 Ibsen, Letters, 199.

policy--the law of least resistance. He scored the national isolation principles in the person of the King of the Trolls with his slogan, "Troll, to thyself be--enough;" and the language controversy he ridiculed by means of Huhu in the Cairo madhouse scene.[47] His indignation had still not discipated itself, though it was in a somewhat better humored vein that he presented a Peer Gynt in politics in the person of Stensgard, that unquenchable politician--"visionary and egotist at the same time"--in the comedy, The League of Youth.[48]

But the humor of this last production is somewhat clouded and the stature of the author considerably reduced from that of the fiery idealist dissenter when one notes that he had made his Stensgard a composite of several of his erstwhile friends of the liberal party. Ibsen had subsequently disassociated himself from the group but these men had still contributed to a fund for his support during his first period of financial difficulties abroad and had been among the signers of the application for his poet's stipend. More than a hint of spitefulness seems evident, moreover, in the fact that Bjornson--to whom Ibsen was most deeply indebted, and whom he had recently but groundlessly suspected of belittling the prosody of Peer Gynt--was the one most obviously caricatured in Stensgard.[49]

Ibsen wrote a very significant and revealing thing about himself to

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47 Halvdan Koht, The Life of Ibsen II, 84.

48 Ibid., 60.

49 Ibid., 64-66.

Peter Hansen, and his interpretation of it is almost as naive for the wary and usually uncommunicative Ibsen as it is over-generalized.

> During the time I was writing Brand, I had on my desk a glass with a scorpion in it. From time to time the little animal was ill. Then I used to give it a piece of soft fruit, upon which it fell furiously and emptied its poison into it--after which it was well again.
>
> Does not something of the same kind happen with us poets? The laws of nature regulate the spiritual world also.[50]

From the abundance of his ignorance--it may be--the layman is impelled to answer, "No!" to this assumption. A divine wrath--righteous moral indignation at injustice or oppression--impassioned, anguished protest at denial and betrayal by a friend? Yes! But one cannot concede that a vindictive and poisonous malice, broodingly fostered, accumulated, and spitefully discharged through the medium of his art, is the essential spirit of the poet. The symbol was, one hopes, even for himself inaccurately as well as ill chosen.

Who can imagine Shakespeare's lampooning his friend, or stimulating his own indignation with the spectacle of the little viper held in captivity? Or does the comparison attach too much importance to the incident? Shakespeare could reproach his faithless friend--if such, indeed, there was--in the haunting music of his sonnets; but hold him up to ridicule! No. However, Ibsen had this to say for friendship, writing to Georg Brandes from Dresden in 1870:

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50 Ibsen, Letters, 199-200.

> Friends are an expensive luxury; and when a man's whole capital is invested in a calling and a mission in life, he cannot afford to keep them. The costliness of keeping friends does not lie in what one does for them, but in what one, out of consideration for them, refrains from doing. This means crushing of many an intellectual germ. I have had personal experience of it.[51]

Ibsen, as has been noted, was often accused of bitterness and pessimism. George Brandes, the Danish critic--to whom he wrote more frequently than to anyone else besides his publisher, Hegel, and whom he judged "good . . . both in his praise and in his censure" because "I am understood"[52]--maintains that Ibsen's is not the philosophical pessimism of Schopenhauer and Hartmann which finds no hope for man's escape from the essential evil of life. His pessimism is of a moral nature based upon a "conviction of the possibility of realising ideals"; hence he, "looking on the world as bad, feels no compassion for man, only indignation and contempt."[53] He writes to Brandes in 1871:

> There are actually moments when the whole history of the world appears to me like one great shipwreck, and the only important thing seems to be to save oneself. . . . I do not believe that things are better in other countries than in our own; the masses, both at home and abroad, are without all understanding of higher things.[54]

And almost two decades later, Ibsen gives to the talented but disreputably and

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51 Ibid., 183.

52 Ibid., 180.

53 Georg Brandes, Henrik Ibsen: Critical Studies, London, 1899, 52.

54 Ibsen, Letters, 218.

destructively weak Brendel, as his final words to Rosmer--whose youthful ideals he had so fatally tutored--a bitter echo of the sentiments above, before he "goes out into the dark":

> Brendel. . . . Peter Mortensgard has the secret of omnipotence. He can do whatever he will.
>
> Rosmer. Oh, don't believe that.
>
> Brendel. Yes, my boy! For Peter Mortensgard is capable of living his life without ideals. And that, do you see--that is just the mighty secret of action and of victory. It is the sum of the whole world's wisdom.[55]

There was, it seems, a tinge of Voltaire in his attitude toward the masses. Like the French deist, Ibsen was somewhat of an intellectual snob, with scant sympathy for democracy, and no belief in it as even a contributing factor in the solution of the social and philosophical problems and questions that he constantly posed in his works. He believed that human nature is, indeed, capable of higher things, of realizing "the claims of the ideal"--to make serious application of the expression that Hialmar Ekdal made ridiculous by vague and irrelevant reiteration. But, paradoxically, he clearly did not consider the common man competent either to recognize these claims or to achieve the goals they ordained, without the prompting and guidance of the great intellects of the time. He maintained that, of the definite and limited amount of intelligence available to the race at a given period, the bulk must be in the possession of a few liberally endowed individuals, whose destiny

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55 Ibsen, "Rosmersholm", IV, 333, The Plays of Henrik Ibsen: Authorized Translation, New York, 1936.

it is to lead the rank and file.[56] Naturally, the greater the number and quality of the geniuses of a given period, the porportionately more stupid will be their contemporaries.

For him, as he warned Brandes on another occasion, the majority is never right--"a fighter in the intellectual vanguard can never collect a majority around him."[57] Again, in 1872, in reference to the violent discussion raised by the latter's initial lectures at the University of Copenhagen on Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature Ibsen wrote to his friend:

> The Liberal press is closed to you? Why, of course! I once expressed my contempt for political liberty. You contradicted me at the time. . . . Dear friend, the Liberals are Freedom's worst enemies. Freedom of thought and spirit thrive best under absolutism; this was shown in France, afterwards in Germany, and now we see it in Russia.[58]

Yet he follows this admission with the following clarion call to arms for "the genius":

> What will be the outcome of this mortal combat between two epochs, I do not know; but anything rather than the existing state of affairs . . . I do not promise myself that any permanent improvement will result from the victory; all development hitherto has been nothing more than a stumbling from one error into another. But the struggle is good, wholesome, and invigorating; to me your revolt is a great, shattering and emancipating outbreak of genius.[59]

This pessimism is apparent in Ibsen's works more strikingly in some

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56 Brandes, Ibsen: Critical Studies, 48.

57 Ibsen, Letters, 350.

58 Ibid., 233.

59 Ibid., 234.

periods of his career than in others. Since Shakespeare, too, has incurred the same accusation from certain quarters, and since the careers of both have been divided into almost parallel periods based somewhat upon the spiritual, or at least the mental, crises experienced by each, this circumstance will be briefly considered in a separate section.

CHAPTER II

PARALLEL PERIODS IN THE LIVES AND WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE AND IBSEN

The plays of Ibsen, like those of Shakespeare have been grouped by critics into four phases, so designated as to suggest that the work of these periods reflects the emotional and spiritual sentiments of the men, contingent to the circumstances of their lives at the time. There are rather striking parallels between respective groupings. For both dramatists there was a period of apprenticeship--as an actor for one, as a director and stage manager for the other--during which the superb sense of stage-craft was developed and sharpened in each to near perfection. It was during this period, too, that Ibsen hopefully fostered his poetic dream, between plays written or produced; while Shakespeare was turning to his sonnets as respite, possibly, from chronicles and adapted comedies. G. B. Harrison[1] notes that Shakespeare at this point did not always have much to say, but that he said it at great length in elaborate imagery and studied cleverness, as one chiefly preoccupied with poetic technique.

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1 Harrison, "General Introduction," Shakespeare, 68.

Charles J. Little remarks that every great dramatist is "driven to worship the older time"[2]--the heroic past when men and deeds were mighty, wherein the greatness of his nation and its people is rooted. After his first experiment with classical antiquity in Catiline, Ibsen's Titus Andronicus,[3] he turned to the Norse sagas to find rebuke and inspiration, holding up the mirror to his people to show them "how they had dwindled." Though the polemic tone of these national plays is not evident to all, the Norwegian people understand them, and Kingmaking or The Pretenders, in which the series culminated, is still popular with them.

No one can say exactly why Shakespeare wrote his Chronicles so close together and just at the time he did. Certainly he had reason on his part "to hold up the mirror" to Elizabethan England, and who can say that such was not his intention.

It would not be to the purpose for this paper, to follow the comparison in detail throughout the respective four periods. The point that is sought can be best indicated in aligning the last two for which commentators--evaluating them quite independently--have drawn such similar conclusions. In Shakespeare's case the interval called "In the Depths," 1600-1608, saw the production of his great tragedies, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, etc., and of the so-called "bitter comedies," Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, All's

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2 Charles J. Little, "Ibsen Compared with Sophocles and Shakespeare," Biographical and Literary Studies, New York, 1916, 279.

3 M. C. Bradbrook, Ibsen, the Norwegian.

Well That Ends Well. Numerous theories have been offered in explanation of the causes and in analysis of this sombre near-decade of the Master's greatest achievement, in which the bitter and tragic note predominate. Gassner attributes it to "the pall that was beginning to fall upon the age of Elizabeth."[4] The turmoil of unscrupulous ambition, moral corruption, political and social intrigue was such that many a man of less keen and balanced judgment must have been outraged and soul-sickened.

For others, the question has implications more personal to Shakespeare. They discern here the shadowy figure of the "dark lady" and the "faithless friend" of the sonnets. Semper ranges himself with some of the more modern critics, notably Sir Edmund Chambers,[5] who hazard the suggestion that the poet was experiencing a spiritual struggle during these years, possibly in connection with his allegiance to the "old Faith," and that his subsequent emergence into the more serene atmosphere of the "Tragi-Comedies," figuratively referred to as the "On the Heights" period, is indicative of a moral and spiritual victory in his own soul which is reflected in his last four plays: Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest.[6] It is in the last named play especially that such a theory finds possible interpretive verification.

Prospero, though deeply wronged seeks no personal revenge; rather,

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4 Gassner, Masters of the Drama, 231.

5 E. K. Chambers, "Timon of Athens," Shakespeare: A Survey, London, 1925, 275-276.

6 Semper, "Shakespeare's Religion," Catholic World, CLVI, 595.

with reason dominating anger, he purposes to lead the evil-doers to confession and repentance, knowing "the rarer action is in virtue than vengeance." His sorcery is said to be the transcendent power of knowledge; his magic, the spiritual force of virtue. Whatever might be repulsive in the magician is made attractive by the virtues of the man. Shakespeare, consciously or unconsciously, put more of himself into The Tempest than in any other of his plays except, perhaps, Hamlet. Prospero's renunciation of his magic powers seems "to ring with medieval contempt for the present life" going far beyond the requirements of the dramatic purpose.

> I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war;
> . . . . . .
> graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd and let em forth
> By my so potent art. But this rough magic
> I here abjure;
> . . . . . .
> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.[7]

If Shakespeare speaks in Prospero, then when he abandons his "rough magic" and retires where "every third thought shall be of my grave," he recognizes that art, like all finite things, "the great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit" is as transitory as a dream. And in the Epilogue, spoken by Prospero, he tells us how he would end his life, a penitent upon his knees

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7 Harrison, "The Tempest" v i 40-57 Shakespeare, 1028.

before the throne of Divine Mercy.

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown
> And what strength I have's my own,
> Which is most faint.
> . . . . . .
> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
> And my ending is despair
> Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself and frees all faults.[8]

Dover Wilson has this to say in his commentary on The Tempest:

> When Caliban talks of grace, we cannot be far from heaven. And that heaven, indeed, keeps close watch over the doings of those who take part in these final scenes is conveyed in all four plays of Shakespeare's Final Period.[9]
> . . . . . .
> The Shakespeare we last catch sight of is no prophet upon the heights, but a penitent on his knees.[10]

Granted that the foregoing analyses are speculative and highly interpretive; it is, nevertheless, arresting when one notes that the critics who make them are Shakespeare scholars of long standing and that they do not change their view point with passage of time and added study. In one of his latest books, Chambers again refers to the question of whether Shakespeare died a Catholic with the admission: "It perhaps fits in with the tone of his latest plays." And he follows this with a curt but unqualified defense of the Davies who added the "He dyed a papist" statement to the Fullman-Davies manu-

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8 Ibid., Epilogue, 1029.

9 J. Dover Wilson, The Meaning of the Tempest, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1936, 19.

10 Ibid., 21.

script. Chambers asserts positively that the one time Chaplain of Corpus Christi at Oxford was not a mere ignorant country parson, and quotes a letter in the Bodleian to Richard Davies from Gilbert Burnet, historian of the Reformation. It is couched in the most commendatory terms. Hence, alleges Chambers, the Sidney who rated him "irresponsible and given to idle gossip" in connection with his statement about Shakespeare's death, could not have known Davies at all.[11]

The two periods in Ibsen's productive career which seem to correspond to the foregoing ones of Shakespeare's are those of his social dramas and of his so-called symbolic plays. After Brand and Peer Gynt, Ibsen left Italy, where he had spent four years of solitude and calm, despite his disaffection with his countrymen. There followed ten years in Germany--Munich and Dresden--during which he was apparently absorbed in his long involved philosophic drama, Emperor and Galilean, "the first work which I wrote under German intellectual influence."[12] The League of Youth and Pillars of Society, the latter a prelude to the social dramas, were the only other works of this time.

But these ten years, according to Bradbrook were fruitful of "a new and drastic change which came over his work . . . due to a loss of faith, and that despair which can be felt behind the confusion of Emperor and Galilean."[13] The remote cause for the change she attributes to the influence of Schopenhauer

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11 E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare Sources, Oxford, 1946, 68.

12 Ibsen, Letters, 413.

13 Bradbrook, Ibsen the Norwegian, 67.

and Strauss. Downs, however, discounts almost entirely the permanent influence of German philosophers except, perhaps, the Philosophy of the Unconscious put forth by von Hartmann;[14] although he admits that after this non-productive interval, Ibsen no longer adhered unconditionally to Hegel, the philosophic lodestar—if he ever had one—of his student and early writing career. Hegel was at this time rather widely discredited in Germany.

The influence to which Downs attributes the silence of these years and the subsequent changes in technique, medium, and subject matter is that of George Brandes,[15] the Danish critic and author of Aesthetic Studies, 1868, and Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, 1872. Brandes hailed the "undeniable genius" of the author of Brand and Peer Gynt but he deplored an "excess of technique" at the expense of probability and a "lack of motivation." Moreover he offered a definite motivation when he said: "That in our days a literature is alive is shown by its submitting problems to debate." Becoming more explicit he demands that "not transcendental matters" but questions that affect daily lives be treated as "for instance, George Sand submits marriage to debate, Voltaire, Byron religion, Proud'hon property, the younger Dumas the relation between the sexes, and Emile Augier the social relations."[16]

That Brandes did profoundly impress and interest Ibsen, at least, we

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14 Downs, Ibsen, 167.

15 Ibid., 139.

16 Downs, Ibsen, 143, citing Georg Brandes, Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, I, 28.

learn from his letter from Dresden in April, 1872.

> I must turn to what has lately been constantly in my thoughts, and has even disturbed my sleep. I have read your lectures.
> No more dangerous book could fall into the hands of a pregnant poet. It is one of those books which place a gulf between yesterday and today. . . . [T]o me your revolt is a great, shattering, and emancipating outbreak of genius. When the men of the old school raise the cry of blasphemy, they ought to bear in mind that they also are bladphemers; the Great One in question has surely had a purpose in creating you.[17]

Brandes was a Jew who had become a free thinker, later even a disciple of Nietzsche. The foregoing passage would seem to indicate acquiescence with philosophic as well as aesthetic principles; yet, in his subsequent works, Ibsen continued acutely concerned with the problems of "Human Responsibility" and with various aspects of the "Either-Or" principle.

Whatever then constituted the struggle which occupied this ten year interval, Downs believes that at least Brandes induced Ibsen to abandon "imaginative literature--which was his forte--for action--which he was intellectually convinced should be a man's work."[18] For when he resumed writing again, it was to produce in prose--always, henceforth--a number of plays of social criticism which are the ones best known in Europe, outside Scandinavia, and in America. It is especially in these productions that he inaugurated his revolt against the theatre of romanticism and demonstrated the "artistic integrity" of the drama of realism. Such plays in this group as The Doll's House, 1879; Ghosts, 1881; An Enemy of the People, 1882; created a furor which burst beyond

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17 Ibsen, Letters, 253.

18 Downs, Ibsen, 144.

national barriers of language and resounded throughout the theatrical world of two continents for a couple of decades, at least. Not only did the dramaturgy outrage the adherents of the "piece bien faite," but the themes and social problems infuriated the righteous.

Of the reception accorded these works in Scandinavia he writes to his publisher Hegel from Rome in 1882:

> I am not in the least disturbed by the violence of the reviewers and all the folly that is written on the subject of Ghosts. I was prepared for it. When Love's Comedy appeared, there was just as great an outcry in Norway . . . . so was there for A Doll's House.[19]

To Rudolph Schmidt at about the same time he comments that "Ghosts has aroused a terrible uproar at home. This I was prepared for, and take very coolly."[20] And again to Hegel he says: "As regards Ghosts, I feel that . . . all the infirm, decrepit creatures who have fallen upon the work, thinking to crush it, will themselves be crushed by the verdict of the history of literature."[21]

William Archer, the indefatigable English critic, producer, translator, and editor of Ibsen, lists a "bouquet of epithets" selected from reviews of his plays, which appeared in the English press during the early 1890's: "revolting," "abominable," "disgusting," "foul," "fetid," "malodorous," "carrion," "an open drain."[22] Clement Scott, one of the leading critics of the

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19 Ibsen, Letters, 348.

20 Ibid., 353.

21 Ibid., 358.

22 William Archer, "The Mausoleum of Ibsen," Fortnightly Review, LX, 1893, 77-91.

day and a rabid anti-Ibsenite says:

> Having flung upon the stage a congregation of men and women without one spark of nobility in their nature . . . an unlovable, unlovely, and detestable crew . . . the admirers of Ibsen . . . abuse the wholesome minds that cannot swallow such unpalatable doctrine.[23]

And opines Oswald Crawfurd: "Ibsen's comedies are such dramatic performances as a popular Lutheran pastor turned freethinker might compose."[24] An unknown writer in the Spectator declares: "The play, The Doll's House, is by no means remarkable for either intellectual or dramatic force."[25]

Today many critics seem to feel that, again, Ibsen was addressing himself, if not primarily, at least with special sententiousness, to his countrymen and inveighing against conditions and problems which he considered immediate to them. That some of his topics had more universal application was to be expected of really great drama. What he was actually condemning was the artificial, convention-ridden, thoroughly utilitarian values on which society functioned and based its moral and religious judgments and conclusions.

But Ibsen was always supremely practical. He always left himself an "out." He prided himself on only proposing questions, not answering them. In a letter to a friend of Brandes he comments on Ghosts thus:

> There is not in the whole book a single opinion, a single utterance, which can be laid to the account of the author. I took good care to

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23 Clement Scott, Theatre, XXIII, 1889, 19-22.

24 Oswald Crawfurd, "The London Stage," Fortnightly Review, LIII, Jan.-June, 1890, 515.

25 Spectator, LXII, 1889, 853-854.

avoid this.

. . . . . .

> Then they say that the book preaches nihilism. It does not. It preaches nothing at all. It merely points out that there is a ferment of nihilism under the surface, at home as elsewhere. And this is inevitable.[26]

Then he adds a very canny postscript suggesting that the Morgenblad be given "any part of the above letter . . . likely to be of interest to its readers."[27]

Immediately after the play was published, William Archer asked him outright how he himself imagined the conclusion. What did he think would be Mrs. Alving's decision about the poison? Ibsen refused a more definite answer than: "Each one must find that out for himself. I would never dream of deciding so delicate a question"[28]

After the hue and cry over the social dramas had somewhat subsided, Ibsen found himself the symbol and hero of a near cult. By 1891 all his prose works including Hedda Gabler had been translated and brought out in English by William Archer. "And by 1893 even Ghosts could be brought out again at the Independent Theater in London."[29] Though Ibsen never became popular with the general public in France, there, also, by 1893 his plays had permanent place in the repertoire of the free theater, L'OEuvre in Paris.

From this time his plays, with the exception of Hedda Gabler, 1890,

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26 Ibsen, Letters, 352.

27 Ibid.

28 Koht II, Ibsen, 167.

29 Ibid., 270.

became more and more symbolic. Bradbrook calls it the "Visionary Period" and says of it: "The four last plays of Ibsen are as sharply divided from his earlier work as the four last plays of Shakespeare. And like Shakespeare, Ibsen seems in these dramas to present not a conflict but a vision of good and evil."[30] There is a marked repetition of the theme of guilt for evil done in the distant past--a sense of the inevitability of the past's rising up to confront and deny the happiness of the present. Rebecca West and Rosmer could not grasp the supposed happiness she had succeeded in putting within reach because her own real guilt and Rosmer's sense of shared responsibility demanded retribution. Solness, the Master Builder, lost the very vision of his art because the corroding sense of guilt for the terrible tragedy his tacit consent had brought upon his wife, Aline, had reduced him to a petty, exacting taskmaster. In the last of these, When We Dead Awaken, 1899, this critic finds Ibsen's final commentary on his own career, and "it is a condemnation of all he had written since he turned his back on poetry and Norway."[31]

The dramatist himself called this play his "Epilogue" to his last series beginning with The Master Builder. Koht considers that the "we" in the title and the fact that Rubek is an artist who questions the ultimate worth of his life, in which everything was sacrificed to his art, clearly indicate a personal accounting with himself on the part of the writer.

When the now shattered and bitter Irene confronts the artist Rubek,

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30 M. C. Bradbrook, Ibsen the Norwegian, 125.

31 Ibid.

who had used her as his beautiful inspiration and model for his masterpiece, and then cast her aside, forgotten, lest she retard and distract him in his avid quest for success and fame, she accuses him:

Irene.
I am my own shadow. . . . Do you understand that?

Professor Rubek.
Yes, yes, Irene, I understand it.

. . . . . .

Irene.
Why dare you not look at me any more?

Professor Rubek.
You have a shadow that tortures me. And I have the crushing weight of my conscience.[32]

With a "glad cry of deliverance" she declares that because of that admission on his part she has come back to him "from the uttermost regions"—from "the world beyond the grave," as she had earlier asserted. And now that he sees, she can talk to him again of the masterpiece he had called "The Resurrection," of which her young, exalted image had been the focal point both in structure and in symbolism.

But Rubek has yet another confession. After her departure he had lost the vision of the original, single purpose of the work. He had added "a segment of the curving bursting earth" with figures, swarming from the fissures, of "men and women with dimly suggested animal-faces . . . as he knew them in real life." The "Resurrection Figure" had been pushed back and from the center of the plinth. Then he answers her anguished cry:

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32 Henrik Ibsen, "When We Dead Awake" II, The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, XI, 409.

Professor Rubek.

Yes, but let me tell you, too, how I have placed myself in the group. In front, beside a fountain . . . sits a man weighed down with guilt, who cannot quite free himself from the earth-crust. I call him remorse for a forfeited life. He sits there and dips his fingers in the purling stream--to wash them clean--and he is gnawed and tortured by the thought that never, never will he succeed. Never in all eternity will he attain to freedom and the new life. He will remain forever prisoned in his hell.

Irene.

[Hardly and coldly] Poet!

Professor Rubek.

Why poet!

Irene.

Because you are nerveless and sluggish and full of forgiveness for all the sins of your life, in thought and in act. You have killed my soul--so you model yourself in remorse, and self-accusation, and penance--and with that you think your account is cleared.[35]

Yet, Irene has her own guilt and remorse to face. She, also, had a "human destiny to fulfill" and she had let it slip to serve the artist, and now she knows she was guilty of "self-murder--a deadly sin against myself. . . And that sin I can never expiate!"

But, now, that they are both awake--she who had sacrificed her self-fulfillment for another, and he who had sacrificed another for his self-realization--"what do we really see then? We see that we have never lived." It is the old tormenting question of the "Either-Or" to which Ibsen has still not found the solution, for there always obtrudes the equally vital question of the dual responsibilities--to self; to others. Ibsen seems to indicate that there is no solution but death. For when, defying remorse, and their "dead pasts"

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35 Ibid., 415-416.

which they themselves have arraigned, they seek on the mountain heights "to live life to the uttermost--before we go down to our graves again," the avalanche overtakes them and the Deaconess' Sign of the Cross and "Pax vobiscum" seem to consign them to a Mercy which they, themselves, have never invoked and never hoped for.

Still, ironically, in the distance rings the triumphant song of the earth-bound Maia: "I am free as a bird! I am free!" Is here, then, the last word, after all? Certainly, Ibsen did not mean that. Rather by the sharp contrast, throughout the play, of her gross personality to the two who strove for something beyond and above the purely material, he indicates that for the striver, even if he can never attain, there is still the implied hope of the "Pax vobiscum."

However, no one need hesitate to admit that he does not know exactly what Ibsen meant. Those who knew him best seemed not to, much of the time. The foregoing attempt to analyse When We Dead Awake admittedly assumes much, even if one recalls that in Brand, too, the, "Deus est caritas" of the Voice in that other obliterating avalanche seems to pronounce the same sentence upon that self-led, fanatically tenacious idealist. Some weight, however, is imparted to this interpretation when one considers that Ibsen, himself, when taken to task for not using classical Latin in this expression, replied that he had purposely used "modern Catholic Latin" because it connotes heavenly love," with an added meaning of mercy."[33a]

33a Koht, Life of Ibsen, I, 282.

H. L. Mencken handles the question for the "epilogue" by the assertion that while he was at work on John Gabriel Borkman, Ibsen lost his mind.[34] The majority of his commentators seem to agree with Downs that in all these final plays and especially in When We Dead Awake he arraigns himself before the tribunal of his own conscience. "Ibsen puts his own question directly and seemingly condemns himself with the answer. To live for art, even when that art subserves life, may kill life."[35] But he makes himself the final judge.

There is a sharp contrast, then, between Shakespeare's final serene surrender of himself and his artistic powers before the throne of Mercy, and Ibsen's anguished cry of remorse answered only by the roar of the avalanche and the "Pax vobiscum" of the Deaconess.

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34 Ibsen, Eleven Plays, viii.

35 Downs, Ibsen: The Intellectual Background, 183.

CHAPTER III

COMPARISON BASED ON CERTAIN MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE AND IBSEN

In this paper, the ethical and religious norms laid down in Scholastic Philosophy have been indicated as the basis upon which the moral order represented by Shakespeare and Ibsen, respectively, will be appraised. It remains, therefore, to compare certain definite religious attitudes and moral concepts as treated in the works of the two dramatists. For, if it be true--as J. Middleton Murray says--that: "We cannot apprehend a work of literature except as a manifestation of the rhythm of the soul of the man who created it," then, surely, one should be able to discern the pattern of the writer's soul from the study of his works. The number of these points of comparison must be limited by the allotted scope and nature of this paper. Attitude toward revealed religion, toward marriage, and toward suicide will, then, be the topics under which comparison will be made.

A. ATTITUDE TOWARD REVEALED RELIGION

Ralph Adams Cram says that Shakespeare is a "soul-child" of the Middle Ages, and the cumulative effect of his works undeniably verifies this

judgment in the opinion of the greater number and of the most authoritative of his commentators. Now the authentic inherent spirit of the Middle Ages was theocentric. William Grace reiterates the opinion of such men as G. Wilson Knight, R. W. Chambers, W. W. Lawrence, and others when he says:

> Shakespeare was instinctively opposed to the ideal of anthropocentric humanism—the ideal of the complete man deriving his total being from life on a purely natural plane. Such an idea was monstrous to him. Iago and Edmund may follow nature—a world they think subject to an unmotivated and unmoral will. 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus,' they say; but these Machiavellians in their pride of limited intellect are hopeless victims of the ironic vice that rushes them.[1]

The reverence which Shakespeare shows for religion—the mysterious relation which exists between God and man—his sense of the utter contemptibleness and unintelligibleness of man and life without reference to the divine are consistently evident. J. Churton Collins goes farther when he says:

> There is a pecular solemnity and tenderness in his allusions to Christ and to the teachings of Christ. Of the respect, moreover, which he entertained for Christianity as a religion, of his conviction of its being able to fulfill all the ends of religion in men of the highest type of intelligence and sensibility we require no further proof than his Henry V.[2]

In this portrait of the ideal Christian Prince we see Henry conforming his official life to Christian principles, demonstrating his belief in prayer, fasting, alms-deeds, and pious foundations for the benefit of the souls in purgatory. In making a case for his Christianity, indeed, one cannot avoid showing

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1 William J. Grace, "Shakespeare's Real Catholicism," America, LXVII, June 27, 1942, 326.

2 J. Churton Collins, "Sophocles and Shakespeare As Theological and Ethical Teachers," Studies in Shakespeare, London, 1904, 150.

how fundamentally Catholic Shakespeare was.

Henry, believing in the righteousness of his contemplated campaign into France, yet seeks confirmation of its justice: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" But mindful of the loss of life entailed, he wants no unwarranted approbation of his project.

> And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
> That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,
> Or nicely charge your understanding soul
> With opening titles, miscreate, whose right
> Suits not in native colors with the truth.
> For God doth know how many now in health
> Shall drop their blood in approbation
> Of what your Reverence shall incite us to.
> . . . . . .
> We charge you in the name of God, take heed.
> . . . . . .
> That what you speak is in your conscience washed
> As pure as sin with baptism.[3]

He scorns petty shows of anger against those ambassadors who bring taunting messages from the Dauphin.

> We are no tyrant, but a Christian king,
> Unto whose grace our passion is as subject
> As are our wretches fettered in our prisons.
> Therefore with frank and uncurbed plainness
> Tell us the Dauphin's mind.[4]

Nor does he hesitate to pardon the churlish censor of himself:

> Enlarge the man committed yesterday
> That railed against our person. We consider
> It was excess of wine that set him on,
> And on his more advice we pardon him.[5]

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3 G. B. Harrison, "Henry V," I, ii, 13-31, Shakespeare, 457.

4 Ibid., 240-244, Shakespeare, 459.

5 Ibid., II, ii, 40-44, Shakespeare, 465.

Yet in his very mercy there is strength to steel him in stern judgment and decision when the weal of his people and of his kingdom are put in jeopardy. Thus his sentence on the traitors:

> Touching our person seek we no revenge,
> But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
> Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
> We do deliver you. Get you therefore hence,
> Poor miserable wretches, to your death.
> The taste whereof, God of his mercy give
> You patience to endure, and true repentance
> Of all your dear offences! Bear them hence.[6]

He knows, too, the answer to the problem of evil in the world:

> There is some soul of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distill it out.
> For our bad neighbor makes us early stirrers,
> Which is both helpful and good husbandry.
> Besides, they are our outward consciences,
> And preachers to us all, admonishing
> That we should dress us fairly for our end.
> Thus may we gather honey from the weed,
> And make a moral of the devil himself.[7]

Going among them incognito, as though one of them, he warns his soldiers of each one's own responsibility to prepare himself for death in battle.

> Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience. And dying so, death is to him advantage, or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gained.[8]

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6 Ibid., II, iii, 174-181, Shakespeare, 464.

7 Ibid., IV, i, 4-12, Shakespeare, 476.

8 Ibid., 184-191, Shakespeare, 478.

This manly king and kingly man, who meets the threat of "great danger" with: "The greater therefore should our courage be, . . . " and "likes me better" to be "unwished" of five-thousand men than to be wished one more, shows himself at his greatest on his knees in urgent supplication and perfect resignation before the Source of all his greatness:

> O God of battles, steel my soldiers' hearts!
> Possess them not with fear, take from them now
> The sense of reckoning if the opposed numbers
> Pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord,
> Oh, not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown!
> . . . . . .
> Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
> Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
> Toward heaven, to pardon blood, and I have built
> Two chantries where the sad and solemn priests
> Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do,
> Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
> Since that my penitence comes after all,
> Imploring pardon.
> . . . . . .
> Now soldiers march away.
> And how Thou pleasest, God, dispose the day![9]

And so does he still stand the test of true greatness in victory:

> O God, Thy arm was here,
> And not to us, but to Thy arm alone,
> Ascribe we all! When, without stratagem,
> But in plain shock and even play of battle,
> Was ever known so great and little loss
> On one part and on th'other? Take it God,
> For it is none but Thine!
> . . . . . .
> Come, go we in procession to the village.
> And be it death proclaimed through our host
> To boast of this or take that praise from God
> Which is His only.
> . . . . . .
> Do we all holy rites.

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9 Ibid., IV, ii, 307-322, Shakespeare, 479.

Let there be sung "Non nobis" and "Te Deum,"
The dead with charity enclosed in clay.[10]

Small wonder is it that the full version of Henry V did not "get into print" until the first folio in 1623. One reads without surprise of the "note in the Stationers' Register for August 4, 1600,"[11] which records that it was not to be licensed for printing. The times of "Queen Bess" did not offer much supporting evidence that virtue is its own reward--that "when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner." If Shakespeare, himself, "had no illusions"[12] about Henry V or his father--who with the true moral insight of the Middle Ages called a "spade a spade" even when by that so un-Elizabethan practice he was self-indicted for craftiness and guileful policy--neither had he any about the age for which he wrote. Yet he pictured for the inspection of that age, and for all ages after, the portrait of a sovereign--truly great as a man and as a king, because all his principles were rooted in Catholic philosophy and tradition. And there is no irony, no sneering, no distortion, no innuendo to indicate anything but his own complete sympathy with that picture of his King Henry V. The most striking, effective, and rhetorical passages are those of his prayer before battle and of his meditation on the emptiness of ceremony and adulation.

In the oft-cited King John Shakespeare had exhibited the exactly opposite attitude toward the king. John is represented as a royal villain and his anti-papal utterances only serve to further stigmatize him. Moreover, it

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11 G. B. Harrison, Shakespeare, 455.

12 Ibid.

is well known that Shakespeare's version is an adaptation of an earlier play and that he deleted all the passages in the old play that misrepresent Catholic doctrine and practice.

The valedictory in the old play runs thus:

> Let England live but true within itself,
> And all the world can never wrong her state;
> Lewis, thou shalt be bravely shipp'd to France,
> For never Frenchman got of English ground
> The twentieth part that thou has conquered.
> Dauphin, thy hand! To Worcester we will march.
> . . . . . .
> If England's peers and people join in one,
> Nor Pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong.[13]

In this vein Shakespeare's Philip Fauconbridge speaks his closing lines:

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue
> If England to itself do rest but true.[14]

The foregoing chronicles were both written before 1599, but this attitude toward all aspects of religion--notably toward Catholic Christian religion--is consistently apparent even in the period of his heavy tragedies and bitter comedies.

In Hamlet, Shakespeare gives us a dogmatically authentic exposition of the doctrine of Purgatory:

Ghost. I am thy father's spirit,

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13 William Shakespeare, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, edited by George Lyman Kittredge, Boston, 1936, 472.

14 Ibid., "The Life and Death of King John," V, vii, 112-118, 504.

> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
> And for the day confined to fast in fires
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away.[15]

and speaks with urgent and reverent understanding of the requisites for the Last Sacraments and the Christian's need of them. It is the Ghost's pathetic lament:

> Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
> Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled,
> No reckoning made, but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.
> Oh, horrible! Oh, horrible, most horrible![16]

that rankles most-like a barb-in Hamlet's brooding consciousness and makes him forego his chance to kill the king at prayer lest the latter be accorded the grace of a cleansing Act of Contrition, that which the fratricide had denied the King, Hamlet's father.

> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To Heaven.
> Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
> He took my father grossly, full of bread,
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,
> And how his audit stands, who knows save Heaven?
> But in our circumstance and course of thought
> 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged,
> To take him in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and seasoned, for his passage?
> No.[17]

Shakespeare illustrates in the soliloquy of Claudius before he

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15 Harrison, "Hamlet" I, v, 9-12, Shakespeare, 614.

16 Ibid., 76-80, 615.

17 Ibid., III, iii, 76-86, 633.

kneels to pray, the elements of true contrition:[18] admission of guilt--"O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;" turning to prayer for help--"Pray can I not, Though inclination be as sharp as will;" remembrance of the boundless mercy of God--"

> What if this cursed hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
> . . . . . .
> Wherto serves mercy
> But to confront the visage of offense?
> And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
> To be forestalled ere we come to fall
> Or pardoned being down?

But he knows full well true repentance, inflexibly demands restitution and amendment of life:

> But oh, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder?"
> That cannot be, since I am still possessed
> O those effects for which I did the murder--
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my Queen.

Shakespeare presents in Claudius a dogmatically accurate picture of a Christian soul adequately informed, but lacking good will.

> Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
> There is no shuffling, there the action lies
> In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
> To give in evidence.[19]

Again he tries to pray and even seems to have grasped that true essence of prayer--the humility to ask for help to pray: "Help, angels! Make assay!

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18 Ibid., 36-55.

19 Ibid., 57-64.

Bow stubborn knees." But in the process of this, not once has he made mention of his most recent evil intent--the plan to have Hamlet murdered in England. His heart is hardened still and set on evil and he admits as much. He has not really wrestled in his prayer:

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below
> Words without thoughts never to Heaven go.[20]

A. C. Bradley notes that "the religious tone of tragedy is deepened near its close" by his "chance" meeting with the pirate ship, his being brought back to Denmark, and by Shakespeare's introducing "that feeling, on Hamlet's part, of his being in the hands of Providence."[21]

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will--[22]
> . . . . . .
> Why even in that was heaven ordinant.
> I had my father's signet in my purse,
> Which was the model of that Danish seal.[23]

Bradley concludes:

> it will be agreed that, while Hamlet certainly cannot be called in the specific sense a 'religious drama,' there is in it nevertheless both a freer use of popular religious ideas, and a more decided . . . intimation of supreme power concerned in human evil and good than can be found in any other of Shakespeare's tragedies.[24]

Horatio seems to pronounce Shakespeare's verdict on Hamlet, and

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20 Ibid., 96-97, 634.

21 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearian Tragedy, London, 1950, 173.

22 Harrison, "Hamlet," V, ii, 10-11, 651.

23 Ibid., 48-50.

24 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearian Tragedy, 174.

there is certainly Christian hope in it.

> Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet Prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest![25]

Othello, written about 1602 and acted before King James November, 1604, assuredly belongs to the bard's "In the Depths" period. At the time, any mention of religion was becoming increasingly prohibitive. Indeed, an Act of Parliament in 1606 forbade even the "use of the name of God in stage plays."[26] Yet Shakespeare obviously made a point of Othello's being a Christian convert. The "references to it are more than casual" in the opinion of Granville-Barker,[27] and that, despite the fact that omission of even such a palliating foil to the racial complication in the play would have been understood by an Elizabethan audience and need not have detracted from the sympathy and pity essential to either Othello or Desdemona. For the religious prohibition was well known to all concerned. Shakespeare implies, moreover, that the Moor is a sincere and ardent Christian when Iago--seeking a rhetorical exaggeration with which to characterize the former's exceeding love of Desdemona--soliloquises, as he plots Cassio's downfall:

> And then for her
> To win the Moor, were't to renounce his Baptism,
> All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
> His soul is so enfettered to her love
> That she may make, unmake, do what she list.[28]

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25 Harrison, "Hamlet," V, ii, 370-371, 653.

26 Ibid., "Othello," Introduction, 700.

27 Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare II, Princeton, New Jersey, 1947, 149.

28 Harrison, "Othello" II, iii, 348-352, Shakespeare, 720.

Again, the tragic irony of the murder scene derives its piercing poignancy from the Christian touch injected by Othello's piteously recommending his as yet only wistfully and pathetically bewildered Desdemona--she still does not realize the enormity of the suspicions he harbors--to prayer:

Othello. Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?

Desdemona. Aye, my lord.

Othello. If you bethink yourself of any crime
Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,
Solicit for it straight.

Desdemona. Alas, my lord, what may you mean by that?

Othello. Well, do it, and be brief. I will walk by.
I would not kill thy unprepared spirit.
No, Heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.[29]

Indeed, Shakespeare seems unable to leave this perhaps most classically tragic of all his heroes without a final testimonial--from Othello's own lips, this time--that it is the betrayal of jealousy and revenge as well as his overly credulous reliance on the perfidious Iago which likens him in his own eyes to "the circumcised dog" he once struck down in Aleppo, and whose counterpart in himself he feels he must deal with in like manner.

Set you down this,
And say besides that in Alleppo once,
Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog
And smote him, thus.[30]

Through the veiled cynicism that unquestionably seems to envelop the

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29 Ibid., V, ii, 25-33, Shakespeare, 739.

30 Ibid., V, ii, 351-356, Shakespeare, 743.

bitter tragedies, like a drab and faintly noxious ground mist on a dull November day, are surprisingly shot brilliant gleams of authentic Christian philosophy and religious perception. In Measure for Measure, for instance, the culpably self-indulgent Claudio conveys to Lucio the reason for his arrest and his dawning rueful conviction that excess brings neither peace nor happiness.

> From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty,
> As surfeit is the father of much fast,
> So every scope by the immoderate use
> Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue,
> Like rats that ravin down their proper bain,
> A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die.[31]

In his turn the fickle, licentious, and thoroughly contemptible Lucio expresses--and for once, sans tongue-in-cheek--his respect for virginity as personified in the aspiring novice, Isabel:

> I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted,
> By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,
> And to be talked with in sincerity,
> As with a saint.[32]

In this same play, Shakespeare puts in the mouth of the Duke a perfect discrimination between attrition and true contrition:

> But lest you do repent
> As that the sin has brought you to this shame,
> Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not Heaven,
> Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
> But as we stand in fear ------[33]

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31 Ibid., "Measure for Measure," I, ii, 129-134, 749.

32 Ibid., I, iv, 34-37, 751.

33 Ibid., II, iii, 30-34, 758.

and he beautifully enunciates through Isabel the boundless mercy of God in compassing man's Redemption:

> Why, all the souls that were forfeit once,
> And he that might the vantage best have took
> Found out the remedy. How would you be
> If He, which is the top of judgment, should
> But judge you as you are?[34]

Almost invariably a man's deepest convictions concerning organised religion will be reflected in his attitude toward its representatives. How often a wistful groper toward the warmth and light of what he only vaguely suspects is his Father's household--"God's plenty" of faith and spiritual fulfillment--instinctively recognises in those who serve Him the reflected image of the divine Paternity and Providence in which he longs to know he shares. How often, too, one who has already signed away his birthright in his innermost soul--or is in danger of doing so--though otherwise conforming in externals, betrays his growing estrangment in his stiff necked censorious, distrustful aloofness from those whose only desire is to mediate for him.

Shakespeare consistently reveals a reverent and appreciative attitude toward clergy and religious in general by the monks, friars, and nuns he introduces as "wise and kind advisers of erring and penitent humanity." Such is his Friar Laurence in Romeo and Juliet, though in the Italian version by Guilietta, which the poet may well have known, Juliet is represented as having well founded misgivings about entrusting herself to the direction of the friar. Of Shakespeare's Friar Laurence she says, after rejecting the

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34 Ibid., II, ii, 73-77, 756.

capricious expediency of her nurse's advice to accept the suit of Count Paris:

> Go, counselor,
> Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.
> I'll to the Friar to know his remedy.
> For he hath still been tried a holy man.[35]

and even the testy Capulet, pere, is made declare:

> Now afore God, this reverend holy Friar,
> All our whole city is much bound to him.[36]

In Much Ado About Nothing, Friar Francis with wise discernment and more tempered judgment than her own father's defends the slandered Hero:

> Call me fool,
> Trust not my reading nor my observations,
> Which with experimental seal doth warrant
> The tenor of my book--trust not my age,
> My reverence, calling, nor divinity--
> If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
> Under some biting error.[37]

And it is his wise and just counsel which devises the best means of tempering the evil repute fallen so unjustly and cruelly upon her and of silencing gossip.

Indeed, Shakespeare, has obviously gone out of his way to picture priests--and priests especially--as zealous, informed and seasoned shepherds of men's souls. This fact is most significant in plays such as Romeo and Juliet and King John which, as has been previously noted, derive from sources

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35 Ibid., "Romeo and Juliet," IV, i, 239-241 and iii, 29, 258 and 260.

36 Ibid., IV, ii, 31-32, 260.

37 Ibid., "Much Ado About Nothing," IV, i, 166-172, 441.

wherein anti-clerical innuendo, if not open vilification were given free rein. He cannot be accused in this respect of playing to the lewd comedy taste of the "groundlings."

It is notable, moreover, that the only men "of the cloth" whom he strokes with a casual or ironic touch are not priests at all, but parsons sketched in as mere straw-characters like the amusing Parson Evans in The Merry Wives, Sir Nathaniel in Love's Labor's Lost, and the rascally parson in As You Like It.

Religion, then--the Religion of the Mother Church of the Middle Ages--is the very warp and woof of the social structure against which Shakespeare has thrown the brilliant and sumptuously varied kaleidoscope of his characters and plots.

G. B. Harrison, in commenting on Shakespeare's constantly recurring imagery of the sea says:

> These images of the sea--and there are about two hundred of them--prove nothing; but they show that Shakespeare was sensitive and receptive to anything that had to do with the sea. A man does not use the sea to illustrate his thoughts unless such images are familiar and spontaneous to him, unless the sea has been an experience. Shakespeare is not the kind of author who is forever reshuffling in his own work phrases or ideas collected in reading.[38]

How much more indicative of Shakespeare's complete understanding and sympathy, of his inner conviction and experience--whatever or why ever his external practice--is his meticulous and persistent care to present so abun-

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38 Ibid., "Introduction," 5.

dantly the fine distinctions and basic verities of Christian doctrine and morals--Catholic Christian doctrine, of course--and to do it in a way no carping censor could protest.

The same forces that in our day try to brand religion as "bad taste," puerile, naive, soporific, or--especially in the case of the Catholic Church, whose inherent moral potency they feel and fear--try to cloak it in the dark-hooded garb of political intrigue, in Shakespeare's England legislated religion, pure dynamite. Both ages spawn their plenty of conscienceless political grafters like Walsingham and Cecil, Lord Burleigh, and of materialistic expedientists in high places like Elizabeth.

Shakespeare brought religion "into the market place"--the religion of the Mother Church of the Middle Ages--in the only way left open to him--"and he keep his head"--and in the one way that was universally acceptable to all classes. The more the Elizabethans had of Shakespeare, "the soul child of the Middle Ages," the less they wanted of Marlowe, the atheist, and of his ilk. And the former's incomparable genius lent to it all the nerve and abandon that a consciously crusading spirit might have lacked. For it is not necessary to assume that Shakespeare was a conscious moral Crusader. But he did have a conscious religious ideal, a directed moral sense, and the moral integrity never to betray either philosophically, in the cumulative effect and trend of his works.

Nothing could be more sharply contrasted than the respective attitudes of Shakespeare and Ibsen toward revealed religion. It has been noted, at some length, that the former wove it into the all-over pattern of the

social and moral background of his plays as a matter of course, an essential element taken for granted. For Ibsen revealed religion--in at least certain aspects--was a stumbling block and a bone of contention which he worried from beginning to end of his career. Yet that fact does not necessarily indicate, of course, that he was either an atheist or an utter materialist. The consensus of considered opinion is certainly that he was neither.

Ibsen's two plays which center directly upon religion, or upon phases of religious experience, are those which he unquestionably took most seriously himself--Brand and Emperor and Galilean. Indeed, the latter was in his opinion the greatest and most significant of his works. He wrote to Frederick Hegel, his publisher, from Dresden in 1873: "I have the great pleasure of being able to inform you that my long work is finished--and more to my satisfaction than any of my earlier works."[39] A few weeks later he confided to Ludwig Daae:

> The work I am now bringing out will be my chief work . . . . The play deals with a struggle between two irreconcilable powers in the life of the world--a struggle which will always repeat itself; and because of its universality, I call the book "A World-Drama." In the character of Julian, however, as in most of what I have written in my riper years there is much more of my own inner life than I care to acknowledge to the public.[40]

It is certainly not safe to generalise freely or to over-simplify the analysis of any one of Ibsen's dramas, without making certain that his

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39 Ibsen, Letters, 250.

40 Ibid., 255.

correspondence--cryptic though it intentionally was--supports or at least does not contradict the interpretation.

In Brand, the earlier of the two plays cited, Ibsen so identified the Kierkegaardian "either-or" theory with religious issues and applications that even in Norway and Denmark, where it was well understood that Brand "was intended to be a national chastisement" of his own countrymen, it was the religious implications which first arrested attention. It "seemed addressed to the conscience of each reader . . . shook souls like a Judgment Day sermon."[41] Despite some inevitable dissenters, its popularity grew until by 1895 it had run through ten printings, and today epigrams and other quotations from Brand belong as much to the nations' "general treasury of speech as do passages from the Bible."[42]

Though Ibsen discounted the significance of this religious application to the problem in the poem, and the fact that Brand was a clergyman,--"I could have constructed the same syllogism just as easily on the subject of a sculptor or a politician"[43]--at the same time he made the admission that "Brand is myself in my best moments."[44] And he nowhere unequivocally and definitely states that none of the religious experiences and implications involved are subjective. It is, moreover, impossible to agree with Downs that:

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41 Koht, Life of Ibsen, I, 288.

42 Ibid., 292.

43 Ibsen, Letters, 173.

44 See Above, 14, n. 36.

He nowhere hints at any belief in a special creation of man, with special prerogatives and special obligations of a supernatural order. Not even a clergyman or a pedagogue in his plays calls to mind that God created men in his own image.[45]

In the first act of the play when Brand upbraids Einar and Agnes for the frivolity of their betrothal feast:

> Mine is another kind of God!
> Mine is a storm, where thine's a bull,
> Implacable where thine's a clod,
> All-loving there, where thine is dull;
> . . . . . .
> In Gibeah's vale He stay'd the sun,
> And wanders without and would do,
> Were not the age grown sick,--like you![46]

he follows the tirade with a statement of what he hopes to teach men to become who will follow his "either or" program:

> But from these scraps and from these shreds,
> . . . . . .
> These torso-stumps of soul and thought,
> A Man complete and whole shall grow,
> And God His glorious child shall know,
> His heir, the Adam that He wrought.[47]

He enunciates even more clearly and basically the relation between God and individual soul in condemning the cupidity of his mother:

> Thou hast debased
> The dwelling-place of God on earth,
> The spirit He lent thee hast laid waste,
> The image that thou bor'st at birth
> With mould and filthiness defaced;
> . . . . . .

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45 Downs, Intellectual Background, 165.

46 Henrik Ibsen, Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, III, trans. C. H. Herford, New York, 1917, 25.

47 Ibid., 26-27.

What will you do
When God demands His own of you?[48]

Then he answers his mother's confused apprehension and wildly-distracted defiance with the assurance:

Never fear;
I take your debt upon me whole.
God's image, blotted in your soul,
In mine, Will-cleansed, shall stand clear.[49]

But when she asks: "My debt and sin you'll wipe away?" his answer indicates a strange concept of spiritual retribution:

Your debt. Observe. The debt: no more
Your debt alone I can repay;
Your sin yourself must answer for.
The sum of native human worth
Crush'd in the brutish toil of earth
Can verily by human aid
To the last atom be repaid
But in the losing of it lies
The sin, which who repents not-dies![50]

Obviously Brand has no idea of original sin and his own very personal ones on the subject reparation for sin.

He has Brand speak again in unmistakable terms on the subject of God's image in man's soul in Act II after his tentative refusal to remain and minister to the famine-stricken people with their "tumble-down church" which he considers symbolic of their materialistic spirit:

I have boldly dared to plan

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48 Ibid., 70.

49 Ibid.,

50 Ibid.

The refashioning of Man, --
-- There's my work, -- Sin's image grown,
Whom God moulded in His own.
Forth! to wider fields away!
There's no room for battle-play!51

To Agnes torn with anguished misgivings for the health of their little son, whose life Brand eventually sacrifices to his stubborn conviction that the perfection of his self-appointed pastorate requires him to keep his family in the fatal climate, he says:

See child; of all men God makes one
Demand: No coward compromise!
Whose works half done or falsely done,
Condemn'd with God his whole word lies.
We must give sanction to this teaching
By living it and not by preaching.52

This is the same Brand, however, who speaks in this Kierkegaardian fashion:

The Man. This work, whereon you've set your will
Is it so precious to you still?

Brand. It is my very life!

The Man. Then stay! [Pointedly]
"Though you give all and life retain,
Remember, that your gift is vain."

Brand. One thing is yours you may not spend?
Your very inmost Self of all.
You may not bind it, may not bend,
Nor stem the river of your call.
. . . . . .
It is Will alone that matters,
Will alone that mars or makes,
Will, that no distraction scatters,

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51 Ibid., 59.

52 Ibid., 85.

And that no resistance breaks.[53]

But when at the end Brand, deserted by his flock, stoned as a false prophet, and lost in the snow and mists of his intended mountain-top cathedral, is warned by the Phantom of his beloved dead wife that he must reject forever his battle cry "Nought or all," he treats this as a last temptation and cries out as the avalanche overtakes him:

. . . . . .
Shall they wholly miss Thy light
Who unto man's utmost might
Will'd--[54]

If the voice in the thunder answering "He is the God of Love" was speaking in condemnation, then Ibsen was rejecting Kierkegaardian idealism; but it does not follow that Brand is the "typical idealist villain" of the piece that Shaw says we must accept "without misgiving;"[55] neither does this rejection of Kierkegaard's "all or nothing" dictum necessarily imply on Ibsen's part a wholesale rejection of Brand's other theological principles, especially his theocentric orientation.

What common-sense, Christian insight makes of the words is simply that Brand, in attempting to die a saint had, as Shaw sardonically comments, "caused more intense suffering by his pseudo-saintliness than the most talent-

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53 Ibid., 75.

54 Ibid., 226.

55 George Bernard Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, New York, 1913, 50.

ed sinner could possibly have done with twice his opportunities"[56] and, he then needed the precise kind of leniency that he had blindly denied to others. God could and would forgive him despite his failure to forgive. If this is what he actually meant, then, at that time Ibsen had some real spiritual insight; and one wonders if it could not have been allowed to develop and to carry him, who knows how far, in the right direction.

Ibsen, however, doubtless knew what he meant and said it when he spoke through Brand about organised religion:

> I speak not as the Church's priest,
> That I am a Christian, even, I doubt;[57]

He had the greatest love and respect for the Bible, but a comment in 1871 from his correspondence with George Brandes enunciates with finality his views on revealed religion:

> Greater things than the state will fall. All forms of Religion will fall; neither moral ideas or ideals of art are eternal. How many principles must we hold as definitive? Who can guarantee to us that in the planet of Jupiter two and two do not make five.[58]

And this view point was, of course, not newly acquired nor freshly expounded. In Brand he had his champion of the "either or" dictum say:

> It is not for a Church I cry,
> It is not dogmas I defend;
> Day dawn'd on both, and, possibly,

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56 Ibid., 54.

57 Ibsen, Collected Works, III, 22.

58 Ibsen, Letters, 1908, 209.

Day may on both of them descend.[59]

Religion was, therefore, for him relative, subjective, individualistic, without universal element and constantly in course of transformation. In Emperor and Galilean Ibsen put in the mouth of Maximus his belief in the transcience of Christianity.

> Julian. Maximus,--the Galilean lives, I say, however thoroughly both Jew and Romans imagined that they had killed him; he lives in their scorn and defiance of all visible authority.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Maximus. Both Emperor and the Galilean shall succumb.
>
> Julian. Succumb? Both--?
>
> Maximus. Both. Whether in our times or in hundreds of years, I know not; but so it shall be when the right man comes.
>
> Julian. And who is the right man?
>
> Maximus. He who shall swallow up both Emperor and Galilean.[60]

In this strange "world-historic drama" as he called it, Ibsen entertained an even stranger hope of "constructing some grand metaphysical scheme to which he could wholeheartedly subscribe and to which he could align all his thought."[61] This program he expressed in the term the "Third Empire" and referred to it repeatedly, once as late as 1887 in a speech in which he stated that "poetry, philosophy, and religion will be welded together into a new

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59 Ibsen, Collected Works, III, 26.

60 Ibid., V, 369.

61 Downs, A Study of Six Plays, 198.

category and a new power, concerning which we who now live cannot at best have any clear idea."[62] Both Ibsenites and anti-Ibsenites are constrained to agree with the Herr Doktor in this last statement and with Koht when he remarks that "the work which was intended to express his positive view of life closes in a question much more enigmatic than any of the works with which he himself meant only to raise questions."[63]

The play was too cumbersome for production and too obscure for satisfactory analysis or spirited discussion. That the "Third Empire" was interpreted to mean an eventual victory for Christianity on earth is proof conclusive that Ibsen's real meaning was widely misunderstood; for though he makes Julian say: "He who has once been under His power--I think he can never be quite free," and though he undeniably portrays Christianity as a more potent, soul-stirring, and pervading force than paganism, "yet it is not a Christian spirit that sustains the work. . . . It was not Christianity. But it was religion."[64]

But Ibsen is nothing if not arbitrary. In a letter to Frederick Hegel, written in Rome in 1868, one is at least mildly and pleasantly surprised to find him asking his friend as a personal favor to select and send him a number of books including "the first books used in religious instruc-

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62 Ibsen, Speeches and New Letters, translated by Arne Kildal, Boston, 1910.

63 Koht, Life of Ibsen, II, 105.

64 Ibid., 106.

tion--all suitable for a child of eight, who, however, is not entirely a beginner. My little boy has read a great deal, especially general and Bible history, but hitherto quite unsystematically; and he must not go on in this way. . . . it is a matter of importance to me."[65]

Maurice Francis Egan insists that Ibsen does not protest against Christianity per se, but against the interpretation of religion as presented by the State Church:

> he simply accepts the fact that Lutheran Christianity does not offer the individual an answer to the intricate problems of life. . . .
> He never pretended to teach; he became an investigator of the middle-class European society he knew. This diagnosis was of German Lutheran conventional society as well as Scandinavian. If he protested against anything, it was against hypocrisy.[66]

More than a little weight is lent to this opinion by the recollection that the self-exiled poet seemed to find peace of soul and quiet contentment nowhere else as he did in Rome. He described life there to "an existence in an atmosphere which can be compared only with that of Shakespeare's, As You Like It."[67] This was said in retrospect in 1870 when he was wintering in Dresden. While he was still resident in Rome he wrote to his mother-in-law: "No politics, no commercial spirit, no militarism, give a one-sided character to the population . . . but they are indescribably beautiful, and sound and calm"[68] More

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65 Ibsen, Letters, 154.

66 Maurice Francis Egan, "Ibsen in Scandinavia," America, XIX, 629.

67 Ibsen, Letters, 199.

68 Ibid., 94.

significant still is his comment made in 1875 when the interests of Sigurd's schooling decided him to move to Munich.

> It is a pity that at Munich I shall be farther away from home; but to make up for this I shall be nearer to Italy, and I shall also have the advantage of living among Catholics, who, in Germany are decidedly to be preferred to Protestants.[69]

The question arises as to why Ibsen, if he was so disaffected with the externalism of Protestant Christianity, didn't note the difference between that severed, dessicated branch and the live, verdant vine of the Mother Church, especially as he was living in Rome so near the very source and fountain head of Her spiritual power. Could it be that he actually did observe and was shaken, and that the "either-or" struggle depicted in Brand and in Emperor and Galilean, the obscure and inconclusive groping in the latter, the change--previously commented upon--which came over the spirit and form of his work, even the long period of comparative silence between The League of Youth, Germany, 1869, and his return to Rome 1878, indicate an inward crisis? And was it finally decided in favor of his over-weaning determination for success, recognition--"I will and shall have a victory some day"--and the concomitant material prosperity? All Ibsen's biographers and commentators agree that he was almost comically, if not pathetically, avid of honors, decorations, gracious and even luxurious living--all the trappings, in short, of the man who has made his mark. His estrangement from Bjornson, first touched off by the latter's supposed failure to defend the prosody of Peer Gynt, was further ag-

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69 Ibid., 282.

gravated by his suggestion that they agree to refuse decorations.[70] Ibsen's letter in reply multiplies arguments against the proposal. "I feel that in declining I should make myself guilty of a lie to myself and others. If I had any real desire for such finery, I should certainly have refrained from playing the part of 'state-satirist.' But if the finery comes my way--why, then, no ado about it,"[71] he concludes. Though the letter ends with protestations of enduring friendship, it is the last friendly letter to Bjornson in the collection until 1882. Until 1873 his correspondence carries numerous bitterly derogatory remarks about his erstwhile friend.

The foregoing observations are so highly speculative that the only justification for them might be the admitted incompleteness of the correspondence, since not a single letter to Ibsen is to be found. Moreover, the editors admit that "for the present, at least, our knowledge must remain incomplete. . . Into some of his most private feelings and most intimate relations with others it is not permissible to allow the public any insight."[72]

With one exception Ibsen delineates clergymen in a manner consistent with his attitude toward the revealed religion they represent. In The Pretenders, he depicts--quite without historical justification--the Catholic Bishop of Oslo in a most unfavorable light, to say the least. Save the self-appointed, self-directed, and in the end, self-frustrated Brand, all the rest

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70 Ibsen, Letters, 96.

71 Koht, Life of Ibsen, II, 52.

72 Ibsen, "Introduction," Letters, 3.

of his churchmen are pastors or parsons of the State Church. Brand and Rosmer are the only two of the lot that he makes anything more than straw figures--spiritual seros--or worse.

Pastor Manders in Ghosts is a classic example--a self-complacent sycophant to artificial and purely surface moral convention, even to mere social usage and class distinctions. For him the whole problem of insurance for the orphanage hinges on the fact that "as I have been your adviser in the matter and have taken charge of the business side of it, I should be afraid that it would be I that spiteful persons would attack first of all---"[73] Again, when, because of his equally stupid and obstinate failure to appraise the degenerate Engstrand correctly, the orphanage is destroyed by fire and the crafty culprit plays upon his susceptibilities with the well-timed observation, "The newspapers won't be very kind to your reverence, I expect," Manders again reveals the true nature of his "pastoral" concern: "No, that is just what I was thinking of. It is almost the worst part of the whole thing. The spiteful attacks and accusations--it is horrible to think of!"[74]

His one answer to Mrs. Alving's disclosures of the sordidness, degradation, and entirely equivocal nature of her supposedly ideal married life are typical of his pseudo-spiritual powers of direction: "No one can be responsible for the result of it. Anyway, there is this to be said, that the match was made in complete conformity with law and order."[75]

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73 Ibsen, "Ghosts," Eleven Plays, 20.

74 Ibid., 62.

75 Ibid., 38.

Molvik is represented as practically a psychopathic and Rosmer's virtues are all on a purely natural basis. His evanescent plans to lead others to "think noble thoughts" could never possibly come to anything because he has no clear-cut principles on which to ground his advice and direction to others. And his susceptible nature makes him the prey to every new ideology presented by any personality stronger than his--his degenerate tutor, the ruthless Rebecca.

Brand, the only strong and positive character among Ibsen's "men of the cloth" has really only a negative message for those he would help. Like Ibsen, for whom he seems to be the spokesman, he constructs "an apologia of the will: 'One must will; will the impossible; will unto death! But the will needs direction and Ibsen offers no direction."[76] Therefore in the words of Maurice Francis Egan, "that he should be taken seriously as a teacher of morals is as amazing to those who know him as it is to the people who gave him birth."[77]

B. ATTITUDE TOWARD MARRIAGE

Marriage in Shakespeare is treated as a basic institution for the happy and ordered course of the moral and social world--in fact, as a Sacrament. In the marriage of Portia and Bassanio is seen the ideal Christian union. It is founded on true love, perfect understanding and mutual respect.

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76 Charles Baussan, "The Moral Ideas of Ibsen," Catholic World, IIXXXVII, August, 1908, 785.

77 Maurice Francis Egan, "Ibsen in Scandinavia," America, XIX, 63.

Bassanio can rest assured he is acceptable for himself, alone, since he can say:

> Gentle lady,
> When I did first impart my love to you,
> I freely told you all the wealth I had
> Ran in my veins, I was a gentleman,
> And then I told you true.[78]

Portia, herself, has such a clear concept of the relationship between man and wife to be achieved by true Christian marriage that she can scarcely wait to place herself under the authority of her husband-to-be.

> Myself and what is mine to you and yours,
> Is now converted. But now I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself. And even now, but now,
> This house, these servants, and this same myself
> Are yours, my lord.[79]

But there is nothing of the clinging vine in her complete acquiescence with the wife's role of helpmate:

> First go with me to church and call me wife,
> And then away to Venice to your friend,
> For never shall you lie by Portia's side
> With an unquiet soul.[80]

Nor does it rob her of her resourcefulness, wit, and courage, but rather stimulates her to use these splendid traits of her personality with new freedom and brilliance in the interests of her husband and of a just cause. She has no misgivings about how he will react to her daring and ingenious plan of imper-

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78 Harrison, "Merchant of Venice," III, ii, 255-259, 320.

79 Ibid., 168-173.

80 Ibid., 306-308, 321.

sonation, after it has once been accomplished by his devoted wife.

Even in the persons of his pagans, the marriage bond and reciprocal conjugal esteem and responsibility are honored by implication--Brutus and his Portia--

> true and honorable wife,
> As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
> That visit my sad heart.[81]

who, on her part, deplores nothing so much as to find herself "in the suburbs" of his "good pleasure;" Caesar and Calpurnia whose fears and consideration for each other almost change the course of fate.[82]

In Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare gives us an illustration of the anarchy and mischief resulting from a conflict between the moral law and the so-called law of honor; and the violated moral law in question is that of marriage. Speaking of Helen, Hector says:

> These moral laws
> Of nature and of nations speak aloud
> To have her back return'd. Thus to persist
> In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,
> But makes it much more heavy. Hector's opinion
> Is this in way of truth. Yet n'ertheless,
> My spritely brethren, I propend to you
> In resolution to keep Helen still;
> For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence
> Upon our joint and several dignities.[83]

Marriage is the first thought of the passionate and youthful Romeo and Juliet. The latter says, hot upon the admission of her pervading, absorb-

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81 Ibid., "Julius Caesar," II, i, 288-290, 545.

82 Ibid., II, ii.

83 Ibid., "Troilus and Cressida," II, ii, 184-193, 672.

ing new love:

> If that thy bent of love be honorable,
> Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow
> By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
> Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,
> And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
> And follow thee my lord throughout the world.
> . . . . . .
> --But if thou mean'st not well
> I do beseech thee-----
> . . . . . .
> To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief.[84]

But Romeo has never meant anything but "well" in his youthful amours, however callow they may have been until now. The good Friar Laurence has been his confidant and adviser through them all, and he wisely tests this new, consuming love:

> Friar L. Jesu, Maria, what a deal of brine
> Hath washed thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!
> . . . . . .
> Thy old groans ring yet in mine ancient ears.
> . . . . . .
> And art thou changed?
>
> Romeo. Thou chid'st me oft for loving Rosaline!
>
> Friar L. For doting, not for loving, pupil mine.[85]

Romeo's plans include the proper preparation for the Sacrament. "And there she shall at Friar Laurence's cell be shrived and married."[86] The "coming to shrift" is not a mere expedient to justify absence from home. Shakespeare in truth, goes to great pains to guard his, perhaps favorite, young lovers from

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84 Ibid., "Romeo and Juliet," II, ii, 143-154, 243.

85 Ibid., II, iii, 69-80, 245.

86 Ibid.

every implication of illicit relations.

This is, indeed, his consistent procedure with all his great lovers--Rosalind and Orlando, Benedick and Beatrice in his earlier romantic comedies, Perdita and Florizel, Miranda and Ferdinand in his later ones--though, as Harrison points out: "In this attitude Shakespeare differs noticeably from his contemporaries," who "play with themes of love outside marriage, and regard infidelity as a natural topic for comedy."[87]

In every instance where Shakespeare deals with such topics he points the evils and disaster that must follow in the wake of illicit passion in the searing remorse or ultimate ruin of its votaries. The havoc and disintegration wrought in the once brilliant personality of Antony by his fatal infatuation is high lighted by that last glimpse we have of a finer, nobler Antony when he sends after the deserting Enobarbus all the latter's treasure with "His bounty overplus."[88] Though Cleopatra is of necessity endowed by Shakespeare with--besides her exotic physical beauty, of course--certain qualities of mind and temperament that explain, at least plausibly, if they do not excuse, her ascendency over men, she is, none the less, an amoral "creature of gaiety, instinct, and passion" whose end can only be destruction for herself and for all she touches. Their story is, indeed, the stuff of tragedy, though not truly great tragedy.

In Measure for Measure all the disasters and miseries that are

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87 Ibid., "General Introduction," 6.

88 Ibid., "Antony and Cleopatra," IV, viii, 21, 897.

visited upon guilty and innocent alike are set in motion by the initial moral weakness and illicit passion of Claudio and Julietta. But Shakespeare sees all the protagonists duly united in the bonds of lawful marriage before he leaves them--even the erstwhile self-righteous but really despicable Angelo and the improbably fatuous Marianna. To the latter the Duke says, even while he meditates dire retribution for the former:

> It is your husband mock'd you with a husband,
> Consenting to the safeguard of your honour,
> I thought your marriage fit.[89]

Shakespeare, then, in his attitude toward every phase and aspect of marriage and in his concept of truly exalting, blissful, and fulfilling love between man and woman meets the highest ideals of Christian morality and practice.

As has been previously stated, it was not the questions he posed on the problem of the "either-or," nor even on the claims of revealed religion, much less those involved in the "Third Empire" theory, which drew down upon Ibsen both the scandalized ire and vituperation of the many, and the almost fanatic acclaim of the anthropocentric votaries of "the new thought." The plays which raised these questions were little known and less understood outside Scandinavia. It was his so-called "social plays," and particularly those which were supposed to attack the institution of marriage that raised the European furor.

Ibsen did, in truth, bring much of this storm and stress upon him-

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89 Ibid., "Measure for Measure," II, ii.

self, and it would be fairly easy to make a case for the opinion that he was sometimes maliciously conscious of shocking, and that he even deliberately sought, on occasion, to do so.

Love's Comedy was the first of his satiric plays. That it was the forerunner of both Brand and the social dramas, he affirms in a letter to Edmund Gosse in 1872:

> in it I have represented the contrast, in our present state of society, between the actual and the ideal in all that relates to love and marriage. The book aroused a storm in Norway when it appeared--the reason for which you will find explained in my preface to the second edition.[90]

The "reason" was that the disaffected ones failed to realize the denouement achieved by Ibsen in Love's Comedy lies mid-way between the foolish attitudinising of Miss Jay--who turns from rhapsodising: "There is no Want where Love's the guiding star"[91] to harrassing her Stiver into negotiating a loan from Gulstad--and Falk's satirised description of the matches, match-making, and match-makers, he sees about him:

> Love is with us a science and an art.
> It long since ceased to animate the heart.
> Love is with us a trade, a special line
> Of business, with its union, code and sign;
> It is a guild of married folks and plighted
> Past-masters with apprentices united.[92]

The marriage of Svanhild and Guldstad, in the end, is one based upon neither artificialities of the first, nor the stodgy conventionality of the other.

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90 Ibsen, Letters, 237.

91 Ibsen, "Love's Comedy," Collected Works, I, 309.

92 Ibid., 398.

Svanhild, in foregoing the ardent, but bohemian and not too stable, Falk for the middle-aged merchant, Guldstad, has linked herself with the most estimable and sympathetic character in the play--the real poet, and the one who represents the Kierkegaardian "moral stadium." He does his duty naturally, and has all his heart in it.[93] "What the protracted relation of a loving woman with a complete aesthetic might issue in is shown in When We Dead Awaken,"[94] and Ibsen seems to indicate that Svanhild instinctively realizes this when she says:

> (joyously, as she throws the ring far out into the fjord)
> Now I have lost thee for this nether life,
> Now I have won thee for eternity![95]

The mutual renunciation of Svanhild and Falk to insure the eternal perfection of their love was interpreted in some quarters as an unqualified repudiation of marriage and as an admission of Ibsen's part that his recent marriage to Susannah Thoresen was a mistake. Ibsen, in sketching the "story of my intellectual development" for Peter Hansen, asserts that Love's Comedy

> gave rise to much talk in Norway. People mixed up my personal affairs in the discussion, and I fell greatly in public estimation. The only person who approved at that time of the book was my wife. Here is exactly the character desired by a man of mind--she is illogical, but has a strong poetic instinct, a broad and liberal mind, an almost violent antipathy to all petty considerations.[96]

But Ibsen's so-called "period of social dramas" was really ushered in by the appearance of The Doll's House followed closely by Ghosts. All pre-

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93 Downs, Six Plays, 16.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibsen, "Love's Comedy," Collected Works I.

96 Ibsen, Letters, 199.

vious stirs of protest were light breezes compared to the extent, duration, and violence of the storm that ensued.

Yet in neither of these dramas does the author attack or discredit marriage as a necessary institution for the ordered, happy, and supremely beneficial functioning of society. But he does treat it negatively and in a manner consistent with his philosophy of individualism.

In The Doll's House he condemns a pact founded upon such evanescent and artificial values that it precludes real union of souls and mutual understanding. Real love, Ibsen indicates, can exist only between beings who, possessing like personalities, are able to aid each other to attain the highest goal of individualistic development. This idea contains a certain element of truth, and Thorvald Helmar, far from measuring up to it, has never even considered sounding the depths of Nora's personality. Her individualistic self-realization and development in any capacity other than that of his adoring, merry, playful child-wife--his "little squirrel" or "song-bird"--has simply never remotely occurred to him.

Nora, despite her adolescent tricks and subterfuges, and even the one seriously unethical lapse committed for the sake of her husband, has many times his capacity for unselfish devotion and true adjustment to mature marital relations. She is understandably shocked and disillusioned when his completely and persistently subjective reactions to Krogstad's threat reveal beyond a doubt the real nature of his supposed conjugal love. She listens with dawning realization to his tirade, which--as long as exposure threatens--utterly ignores her reason for the ill-advised attempt to assume the responsibility of helping

him at the price of her own integrity. She is an awakened Nora who hears him through the following:

> The matter must be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before--but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you. . . . From this moment happiness is not the question; all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance.[97]

But when the threatened danger is removed, his attempts to restore matters to the former--she realizes now--outrageously equivocal basis that represents perfect married life, from his point of view, are even harder to take. "You have no idea of what a true man's heart is like, Nora. . . . a man that has forgiven his wife . . . has made her doubly his own; he has given her a new life. . . . she has in a way become both wife and child to him . . . only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you."[98] Nora is right in feeling that drastic measures are indicated, at this point.

> I am not fit for the task. [of educating their children] There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.[99]

For Nora to withdraw for a period of self-orientation, with a view, incidentally, to throwing a little salutary scare into Torvald, and affording him the opportunity to prove his claim that he has it in him "to become a dif-

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97 Ibsen, "The Doll's House," Eleven Plays, III, 243.

98 Ibid., 245.

99 Ibid., 247.

ferent man,"[100] might prove a wholesome and curative measure, permissible on religious as well as ethical grounds. The potential depends upon the condition that Nora have a clear-cut basis on which to build her reorientation. That, of course, she has not, by her own admission. Religion, the law, moral standards are all to be subjected to investigation by her and--for all she states differently--she is to be her own guide--her own judgment, the sole criterion--in this search for "what is true for me."[101]

Ibsen's concluding scene is no solution at all for Nora, who is a mother as well as a wife. As a permanent arrangement, or as an arrangement of doubtful duration and outcome, leaving the children to be trained by the man she now knows their father to be is, of course, wholly unjustifiable. But this last scene is wonderfully effective theatre, and Ibsen had that goal always in mind. According to H. L. Mencken:

> He gave infinitely more thought to questions of practical dramaturgy--to getting his characters on and off the stage, to building up climaxes, to calculating effects--than he ever gave to the ideational content of his dramas.[102]

The author himself, claims that he never wrote because "I had, as they say, 'found a good subject.'"[103]

There is no doubt that both The Doll's House and Ghosts were typical for the Scandinavian society of Ibsen's day. Not only did a woman lose all

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100 Ibid., 250.

101 Ibid., 249.

102 Ibsen, "Introduction," Eleven Plays, IX.

103 Ibsen, Letters, 198.

title to her property when she married, but she must accept her husband's sole legal authority in regard to the children, "their future; the quality of their education; the religion they must accept."104 According to Maurice Francis Egan The Doll's House was considered to be "radicalism, and radicalism in Scandinavia is not a political theory; it applies to morals as well."104a

Ghosts was intended by Ibsen partly as an answer to the bitter controversy aroused by the previous play--an exposé of the degradation and dire evils that must result from a marriage such as Mrs. Alving's was from the beginning, and such as Nora's might conceivably have become had she remained home, but brought only the former's repressive and convention-ridden methods to the solution of her problem.

In no sense can Ghosts be considered an attack on marriage as an institution. Even Oswald, in defending the "unofficial families of the left bank" in Paris makes it clear that economic pressure alone deters the members from achieving the status they would prefer. A weak enough defense, but, at least, not derisive or ribald.

Mrs. Alving admits responsibility for being Puritanically self-centered and unresponsive in the early days of her marriage, and cravenly ruled by convention in the refusal to free herself from the eventual conjugal slavery she endured in the end. Anyone under the direction of Pastor Manders could be expected to go to extremes when she did finally strike out for freedom.

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104 Maurice F. Egan, "Ibsen in Scandinavia," America, XIX, 629.

104a Ibid., 629.

But Ibsen in neither of these plays canvasses all possible solutions for his women. No spiritual consideration, either in connection with marriage as a Sacramental bond nor as motivation for their efforts to solve their respective dilemmas, enters in, of course. For both Nora and Mrs. Alving, failure to realize self--to develop self to the fullest extent--is, according to Ibsen, the real issue. He simply shows how the artificialities and conventions of the day as they functioned through marriage could frustrate this all-important self-realization.

C. ATTITUDE TOWARD SUICIDE

As moral courage is the highest form of courage attainable by God's rational creature, man--the supreme test and measure of his likeness to his Creator--so is moral cowardice the most tragic and devastating evil to which he could succumb. No Christian can doubt that the impulse to self-destruction deliberately entertained and perpetrated is rooted in moral cowardice.

Shakespeare has quite a few suicides among his tragic characters. Some, rushed by their unholy urges and appetites to the dreadful brink from which they see, at last, the ruin of all their earthly hopes and cravings spread before them in horrid chaos, plunge to irremediable ruin. Others, susceptible and unanchored persons, like Ophelia, cannot bear up under "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. . . . The heartaches and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,"[105] nor longer endure the "weary, stale,

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105 Harrison, "Hamlet," I, ii, 133-134, 609.

flat, unprofitable . . . uses of this world."

"The foul'st best fits my latter part of life,"[106] exclaims Enobarbus as he resolves to use his sword if his remorse does not shortly break his heart. Though he knows Antony to be no longer worthy of his erstwhile devoted service, yet he despairs of ever finding another master like the one of which he is so poignantly reminded in that last bounteous gesture of Antony's. He can't forgive himself for ever forgetting the former stature of the man.

As for the betrayed master, Antony, and his exotic betrayer, their ends were inevitable. Antony had long since lost all semblance of the man and mighty general he once had been, and the amoral Cleopatra had long since filled up the measure of her wholly selfish, crafty, and destructive allure. So, too, dies the wicked and impenitent Goneril; while Othello finds, like Lady Macbeth, that the "access and passage to remorse" will not remain stopped up, nor will power, pomp, and circumstance shut out for long "compunctious visitings of nature."[107]

In none of these instances, then, is self-destruction associated with anything but intemperance, despairing remorse, and retribution. Into the mouth of Brutus, the noblest of those who fall by their own hands in his tragedies, Shakespeare puts, not merely a general condemnation of self-destruction, "but a condemnation of the one suicide which tradition had universally glorified and

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106 Ibid., "Antony and Cleopatra," IV, viii, 37-38, 897.

107 Ibid., "Macbeth," I, v, 45-47, 837.

which even Dante appears to have excepted from the catalogue of crimes."[108]

> I did blame Cato for the death
> Which he did give himself; I know not how,
> But I do find it cowardly and vile,
> For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
> The time of life: arming myself with patience
> To stay the providence of some high powers
> That govern us below.[109]

There can be no doubt of Shakespeare's unequivocal repudiation of suicide on grounds of both the natural law and of revealed religion. The oft-quoted and immortal lines of Hamlet's first soliloquy could not be otherwise interpreted.

> Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! Oh, God! God!
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't, ah, fie![110]

The suicides in Ibsen's plays are less numerous and in most cases lend themselves less readily to analyses of the author's underlying views on the subject from a moral standpoint.

Poor little Hedvig is, of course, the pathetic victim of the absurd delusions of two crass fools. She probably would never have conceived the idea of suicide had not the pontifical and interfering Gregers persuaded her that she must sacrifice her dearest possession, the wild duck, to convince her father of her love and devotion. Then the ridiculous Hialmar, in his obstinate

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108 Collins, Studies in Shakespeare, 156.

109 Harrison, "Julius Caesar," V, iii, 102-108, 561.

110 Ibid., "Hamlet," I, i, 129-135, 609.

determination to play the role of the wronged idealist for all it was worth, dragging it out to the last possible gesture--short of putting himself to any serious inconvenience--seized upon the credulous, adoring child as a foil for his mood of mixed self-pity and guilt for the previous evening's carousing.

After viewing for fourteen years Hialmar's assiduous dramatizing of himself and his supposed struggling genius, Hedvig is still incredibly susceptible to his least whim. She seems to believe herself completely repudiated by his repeated refusal to look at her or to address her directly. His silly "In these, the last moments I spend in my former home, I wish to be spared from interlopers---"[111] terrifies her the more because she only senses the meaning of the word without grasping the ludicrous exaggeration. It is then she secures the pistol and slips into the garret. At this point she has only the holocaust of her beloved wild duck in mind. She says softly and significantly, "The Wild Duck."

Ibsen evidently wants it understood that the ensuing conversation between the two men is partly overheard by her--a possibility, since Gregers hears the duck shortly before the fatal shot--because the shot comes just after Hialmar, in the process of letting Gregers work him back to a position where he can, without "sacrificing the claims of the ideal" accept Hedvig again--and so, of course, stay home--says: "If I then asked her: Hedvig are you willing to renounce that life for me? (Laughs scornfully) No thank you! You would

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111 Ibsen, "The Wild Duck," Eleven Plays, 107.

soon hear what answer I would get."[112] Hedvig acts then in confused desperation and is clearly not responsible for her deed. The onus rests entirely upon the stupid and fanatical adults, and the issue, hence, is not suicide, but selfishness and exploitation of a gentle, loving, perhaps slightly abnormal nature.

Hedda Gabler is, like Goneril and Iago, a completely vicious character, but in a less positive way than were Shakespeare's two colossal villains. She is an utterly amoral, materialistic person--selfish and egotistical, yet convention ridden. Hedda has never developed in the slightest any spiritual outlook, impulses, or aspirations she may conceivably have had. It is not surprising that she, too, finds unendurably "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable . . . the uses of this world." One expects her to refuse to meet the consequences of her cruel spite and jealousy, especially as the stigma of scandal threatens her name. Her end is completely in character and there is no indication whatever that Ibsen extenuates her guilt.

In Rosmersholm, however, the joint suicide of Rebecca West and Rosmer presents a moral issue treated with the typical Ibsen touch. The remorse of conscience which motivates them--though for different reasons--is the theme of his last four plays. Rebecca mourns that she killed in Rosmer his belief in himself and in his mission--that of "ennobling thousands of minds by the Rosmersholm view of life."[113] She is ready to make the same sacrifice for him

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112 Ibid., 114.

113 Ibsen, "Rosmersholm," Eleven Plays, 264.

that Beata had made, and he, at first, concedes: "I should have to believe you then. I should recover my faith in my mission. Faith in my power to ennoble human souls. Faith in the human soul's power to attain nobility."[114]

But when he sees she really means what she says and even answers his remonstrances--now become as insistent as were his former pleas for a sign of her good faith--with: "I am under the dominion of the Rosmersholm view of life--now. What I have sinned--it is fit that I should expiate,"[115] it is, after all, too late. He finds he cannot throw off the guilt he feels as the unconscious cause of Beata's suicide, cannot throw off the crushing compulsion to make amends; but neither can he recapture the faith of which Rebecca's insidious reasoning when she first "went to work" has robbed him. They have exchanged positions; only his is now one of despair: "Well then, I stand firm in our emancipated view of life, Rebecca. There is no judge over us; and therefore we must do justice upon ourselves. . . . I am certain that it is the only way."[116]

When Rebecca asks: "Is it you who follow me? Or is it I who follow you?" he answers, "We shall never think that question out."[117] Here we have a typical Ibsen ending, paralleling that in Ghosts, with its question of euthanasia. Ibsen--it has been previously noted--refused to commit himself when

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114 Ibid., 339.

115 Ibid., 340.

116 Ibid., 340-341.

117 Ibid., 341.

asked if he thought Mrs. Alving should administer the morphine to her son. Neither would he take the responsibility for the personality he had created, by saying which alternative would be more characteristic of her.

In the Rosmersholm play he can scarcely be said to be completely non-committal on the subject of suicide; since both his, "convert" and his "apostate" feel justified, even exalted, in their self-chosen means of amends. One can assume that Mrs. Alving's final struggle, too, is more in the realm of maternal love and anguished pity for the son bearing the mark of the father's sins than on moral and ethical grounds. She has stated clearly before that her reading in new fields of thought has helped to open her eyes to the nature of the "ghosts" of ethical convention and religious formalism. In that view point Ibsen would certainly stand behind her.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Ibsen and Shakespeare, each in his separate era, belonged to an age on which a recent and cataclysmic movement had laid hold. The culture of Elizabethan England, though its taproot was still sunk in the rich sub-soil of the Middle Ages, was, nevertheless, permanently and profoundly affected by the lavish influx of arts and learning channeled into her schools and universities by the Renaissance. However tardily introduced, the humanistic phase of the movement, once launched, was dynamically stimulated by the spirit of conquest, of self-glorification, of nationalism engendered by new commercial, maritime, and colonial rivalries and intrigues.

Unquestionably, the Renaissance was one of the more immediate causes of the so-called Reformation. Nevertheless, the advent of the Reformation and the fluctuations under successors of the nefarious Henry VIII from out-and-out Protestantism to restoration of the Old Faith and back to Protestantism--enforced ultimately by grinding penal laws--wrought a marked change in the character and moral tone of the English Renaissance. As first sponsored by Saint Thomas More, the martyred Chancellor of Henry VIII, the movement had been sieved of its purely pagan aspects and adapted to Christian standards of cul-

ture. Saint Thomas, the greatest English humanist, established a perfect relationship between the humanities and the supernatural. But with the former restraints finally completely broken down under Elizabeth, and no new ones firmly entrenched, ambition for free development--the essential spirit of the Renaissance--grew apace. Legouis comments in this regard:

> To the tardiness of the Reformation in closing its grip on the country England owes the glory of her drama, her most magnificant literary achievement, and also a large part of the glory of her other poetry under Elizabeth and James I.[1]

And to the still diffusing spirit of the Middle Ages fostered by Mother Church, the mentor and teacher of all that was finest in Medieval culture, England owes the supreme genius of her "Golden Age of drama." It is his insight into the workings of the human soul, and his basically and sympathetically Christian interpretation and demonstration of his probings that make Shakespeare's characters the immortal personages they are. None of his contemporaries--nearly all tainted with the pagan aspects of the Renaissance--can compare with him in the creation of personalities that move as living beings--their souls laid open to us--down the ages. Even his pagans and unqualified villains know when they "have my eternal jewel given to the common enemy."

The Romantic Movement, in the turbulent high tide of which Ibsen was born and pursued his career, was the logical outcome of the Reformation and the Renaissance. In its more exaggerated aspects it was, like the other two trends, essentially anthropocentric. While this new ideology pushed the former revolts

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1 Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamain, A History of English Literature, Revised Edition, two Volumes in one, New York, 1947, 261.

back upon themselves in some phases--so that the inherent hollowness of the one and the barren futility of the other gave way under the superimposed social structure they could not support--in other directions it surged forward through new and quite unexpected channels. As Cazamian remarks:

> If one looks at society as a whole, this period does not coincide with a phase of exuberance, [as the term "Romantic" seems to imply] but rather with one of unrest and of secret want of balance. . . instability in moral life itself. . . . Outwardly, at least, the sentimentalism inherited from the preceding age is contradicted by the elegant cynical scepticism of contemporary manners. . . . The bulk of the nation, however, pursues the task of industrial and commercial expansion; its practical standard is that of utilitarianism which daily becomes more clearly defined.[2]

But the "Back to Nature!" cry was really a credible "next step" for either the paganised aesthete, denying original sin, or for the self-led, private interpreter of Revelation, adapting what he professed to accept as eternal, Divinely-ordained verities, to the cold rule of reason, expediency, and "common sense." For the second group Religion became a cloak for selfishness and every form of exploitation, in national policy as well as in individual lives. Convention and appearances were the real gods that were served in the guise of religion and moral criteria by too many of the adherents of the constantly dividing sects spawned by the Protestant revolt.

It was to this artificial, smug religious externalism that Ibsen objected so violently and against which he directed the barbed queries of his social dramas. He railed against convention-ridden society and the hypocricies he seemed to believe inherent in the Christian order, while paradoxically ad-

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2 Ibid., 1031.

hering, himself, meticulously to the structures of social usage, of decorum, and of public morals. Except for one lapse in his impecunious youth—evidently bitterly deplored and expiated with whatever material remuneration was required or acceptable—the externals of Ibsen's life conformed to the most exacting norms of Victorian moral rectitude. His married life was irreproachably conventional and staid, and seems to have been congenial. His son was baptised[3] and given planned religious instruction.

The same observance of external propriety manifests itself in his plays. There is not a scene in one of them that could not be suitably presented—except for the implications of the dialogue—before an audience of teen-age maidens. What William Archer says of A Doll's House is almost universally true of the diction of all the others:

> There are two passages, one in the second and one in the third act, which Mr. Podsnap could not conveniently explain to the young ladies in the dress-circle. . . . I have more than once been reproached . . . with having cut the speeches which first night critics pronounced objectionable.[4]

Yet, from the first, the spirit of Ibsen could not fail to be recognised for what it was—self determinism incarnate.

Of both Shakespeare and of Ibsen it can be said then that, the key to life is for him, as it was for his age, the assertion of the individual. Both create highly individualised characters, and the conflicts in their plays

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3 Ibsen, Letters, 17.

4 William Archer, "Ibsen and English Critics," Fortnightly Review, LI, 1889, 36.

are invariably produced by exertions of the human will. But in Shakespeare, there is none of that "specious and perverse impartiality" which assumes a neutral stand between good and evil, which pretends to hold even scales for virtue and vice. In the words of William Grace:

> Shakespeare indicates answer to the problem of evil and iniquity in what may be called his "organic supernaturalism." Shakespeare never conceives the natural world as functioning with unlimited autonomy. On the contrary, he considers it intimately connected with the supernatural. He was steeped . . . in this case in the scholastic conception . . . of the "heavenly bountifulnesse."[5]

A man may be moral, of course, without being religious. The knowledge of the moral law is inherent in the conscience of every man, but he is not the author of it. Therefore, if a man pretends fidelity to this moral law--conscience--in himself, but fails to discern an Author and final Arbiter thereof, he cannot be said to adhere to a "Moral Order"; for "order" is a method, a system, a plan which must presuppose an Originator.

One who is not Christian may certainly be moral; many of the ancient pagan philosophers were, and, further, even adhered to the "Moral Order." For Sophocles, the moral order was greater than the will of the gods. His characters rose to heights of moral sublimity when, refusing to despair, their souls remained true to the eternal moral law that is superior to gods and men alike.

Two personages dominate in classic drama--man and destiny. In Ibsen's plays, it is the individual and society. "It is because I was strongly im-

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5 William J. Grace, "Shakespeare's Real Catholicism," America, XLVII, June 27, 1942, 325.

pressed by the contradiction which we have introduced between human nature and societies founded by men, that I have written what I have written. It was my vocation."[6] But duty for him is to follow one's nature; one's vocation is to cultivate selfhood. He walks alone through life, impelled by this "sense of duty" toward a goal which he has created himself and imposed upon himself.

Though Ibsen speaks in requesting a pension, of "the task which I know has been laid upon me by God . . . that of arousing the nation and teaching it to think great thoughts,"[7] he edits the "voice of God" until it is the uncontrolled suggestions of his individual conscience that he actually follows.

His "arousing the nation to think great thoughts" consists in posing questions to which he offers no answers. Now it is not possible to ask questions instructively or constructively without having an answer or goal in view, or, at least, a direction in mind. Socrates did not have all the answers but he knew the general direction of the path along which he led their minds as he walked with his young students and catechised them in the groves of Athens. But neither is it possible for the questioner to dissemble for long the fact that he has no answers, himself, or that he fears to face the ones he is invoking. If surrender is necessary in art and aesthetics, it is doubly so in ethics and religion. Ibsen, having surrendered all else to the "self-realisation" polemic, failed--or lacked the courage--to face the eternal reasons for self-realisation. It is the mistake Shakespeare never makes. He never fails

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6 Ibsen, Letters, 198.

7 Ibsen, Letters, 102.

to recognize the fallibility of human nature to judge when it is attaining the fullest self-development, and the need it has to seek the eternal, infinite Guide, Who is at the same time the Goal of man's will and the ultimate supreme fulfillment of his nature. In view of this failure, Ibsen cannot be said to possess a moral order in the sense first defined in this paper; whereas, in the words of Doctor Grace:

> Shakespeare is indeed a great moralist in the only way in which an artist should be a moralist--in his mimesis of life that causes us to recognize the profound truths of our nature. Avoiding didacticism he shows us reality--a much more complex thing than is usually conveyed by "realism."[8]

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8 William J. Grace, "Shakespeare and Man's Nature," America, XLIX, June 19, 1943, 298.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Henrietta Marie McLoughlin, S.P. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 20, 1963
Date

Norman Weyand, S.J.
Signature of Adviser